The OLD COUNTRY

A ROMANCE

by

HENRY NEWBOLT

H. W. Ralfe

Olivia Rodham

1913

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A ROMANCE

BY

HENRY NEWBOLT

AUTHOR OF

"TAKEN FROM THE ENEMY," "THE YEAR OF TRAFALGAR,"
"ADMIRALS ALL," ETC.

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"In Eternity there is no distinction of Tenses.

"And in this sense, I say, the World was before the Creation, and at an end before it had a beginning; and thus was I dead before I was alive: though my grave be England, my dying-place was Paradise.

"He who hath thus considered the World, as also how therein things long past have been answered by things present, how matters in one Age have been acted over in another, and how *there is nothing new under the sun*, may conceive himself in some manner to have lived from the beginning and to be as old as the World: and if he should still live on, 'twould be but the same thing."

SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

TO THE

RIGHT REV. COSMO GORDON LANG, D.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF STEPNEY

My dear Lang,

You kindly promised, when we last parted, to give me your criticism and advice upon certain portions of this story before it went to Press. I have very reluctantly denied myself these great advantages, because I saw upon reflection that my subject is one about which I could hardly consult you without involving you more deeply than I had any right to do. Still, though the author alone must be responsible for his book, he may, I hope, dedicate it to you; not with any intention of seeking the support of your name for his own theories, but in grateful commemoration of an old and valued friendship.

It falls short, I fear, of modern standards; burdened as it is with something like a purpose, and enlivened by no portraits drawn from life. It is true that all the fourteenth-century characters in the book once played their parts in England, and were perhaps not very unlike

the picture I have given of them; but I can offer my readers no hope of discovering among the rest, with or without a key, the face or personality of a single living contemporary. Gardenleigh alone has some resemblance to a sketch from nature, and there I put my trust in the generosity of its possessors, remembering that they have before now forgiven me a far costlier theft.

The purpose is a more serious fault; but even that you will view with less severity because you are yourself a lover of History, and must often have regretted that the life and motives of our ancestors should be so travestied as they have generally been. It would seem to be the common belief and pride of the gentlemen of England that they are descended from forefathers who were utterly different from them not only in their choice of clothes and oaths, but in habitually pursuing a behaviour which would qualify in any civilised country for solitary confinement of one sort or the other.

My hero comes upon the stage afflicted with these curious delusions. Happily he is not too old to learn; besides, long travel has familiarized him with many varieties of speech and costume, and being a student of ideas rather than appearances, he is more struck, when he reaches the England of 1356, by the points of similarity between the thought of the fourteenth and twentieth centuries, than by the external and trivial differences which counted for so much in the books from which his knowledge of the past was derived. To accord with this bent of his mind,

as well as with the convenience of the reader, I have translated the dialogue of my characters out of the Latin and Anglo-French of the original authorities into language which aims at being a faithful transposition, and is, in fact, often a word-for-word rendering. This is Sir Walter's method—you remember the Dedicatory Epistle to Ivanhoe—and, as in Sir Walter's case, the effect is sometimes startlingly modern. But nothing could be more modern than the letters of John de Grandison or the war-reporting of Geoffrey le Baker; and even in the less-authenticated passages I believe that I have used no expression which is not justified by documents or which would be absurd or unintelligible to an Englishman of the fourteenth century if it could be literally retranslated to him. The heroine's name, Aubrey, inherited from her ancestresses Aubrey Marmion and Albreda de Warrenne, I have ventured to retain, though it is now unfamiliar as a feminine name.

Harry Marland's account of the battle of Poitiers is, I hope, the true one. It contains, at any rate, all that it is possible to incorporate of the narratives of the four authorities whom I have consulted. The most valuable and probably the least-known of these is the *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynbroke*, which I have closely followed throughout, supplementing it, where I could consistently do so, from the "Chronique Normande" and from Froissart's anecdotes and the contemporary poem of the Chandos Herald. In one or other of these four will be found every detail of the battle contained in my

39th and 40th chapters; but I confess that I alone have made Devon men of the archers who charged up the waggon side of the hill and drove the French off down the other slope. It is merely a matter of inference: if Lord Bryan was there, and they were his men, Devon men they must have been.

About the sense of Time I do not remember that we have ever had any talk together; but I have only to think of you to realize the paradoxical nature of our common system of measurement. It was but yesterday that I first saw and heard you at the Union, speaking eloquently in defence of the Church, though by the University Calendar it is nearly a quarter of a century ago. On the other hand, it is many a lifetime—is it not?—since we said good-bye in the Library after our last paper in the Old Schools: though one-and-twenty little years are said to cover all those mortal changes and rebirths. I offer no solution of this mystery of Time; but I have ventured to suggest that it is one worth thinking about, if only that we may be less prone to forget the sympathy we owe to the brave and ardent spirits who hoped our hopes before us, and who belong to a past which can never be truly spoken of as dead. So much, at least, you can accept of my book: with the rest you will deal gently, as the offering of your sincere friend and admirer,

HENRY NEWBOLT.

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THE OLD COUNTRY

I

GARDENLEIGH, says the Post Office Directory, is a parish partly bounded by the Sel river, two miles north from Selwood station on the Baymouth branch of the London and Somerset Railway, in the Selwood division of the county, Selwood hundred, Selwood petty sessional division, union, county court district, and rural deanery; archdeaconry of Wells and diocese of Bath and Wells. The Church of St. Mary stands on an island in a lake in the park, and is a small edifice of stone in the Early English style, consisting of chancel, nave, transept, south porch, and a small western turret containing one bell; in the church are monuments to the family of Silvayne, former owners of Gardenleigh, and several windows containing fifteenth-century glass, besides much interesting carved stone-work. The building was restored in 1879 from plans by the late Sir Gilbert Scott, R.A., and has sittings for eighty persons. The register dates from

1623. The living is a rectory, with the vicarage of Croonington annexed, joint net yearly value £215, in the gift of Walter Earnshaw, Esq., and held since 1886 by the Rev. Dr. Simpson, of Magdalen College, Oxford, who resides at Croonington.

This leaves no room for doubt as to the place of Gardenleigh in the scheme of local government and its ecclesiastical advantages; the remainder of the description is an equally terse combination of the picturesque and the practical. Gardenleigh Park, it continues, once the property of the Silvayne family, who were in possession for about three centuries, is the seat of Walter Earnshaw, Esq., lord of the manor and sole landowner. The present mansion occupies an elevated position in the centre of an undulating park of about eight hundred acres, which comprises nearly the whole of Gardenleigh parish, and is a building of stately appearance, in the modern style, erected by the late Joseph Earnshaw, Esq., and commands fine views of the surrounding country. The park is adorned with numerous groups of elms and forest trees, and contains a lake of twenty-four acres and two smaller ones; the soil is loam and marl, and the subsoil marl. The land is chiefly in pasturage; the area is seven hundred and sixty acres of land, and thirty of water. The population at the last census was thirty-eight. Letters through Selwood arrive at eight and four.

Such, to the sane eye of the Directory, is Gardenleigh—no great seigneurial demesne, no historic lordship, no legendary scene of romance. It does not figure among the coloured photographs which adorn the newer carriages of the Somerset railway; it is not even, like some of its neighbours, to be viewed by ticket, on Wednesdays only. It is merely, what it has been for eight centuries, an English home, now, as always, the possession, not of a noble house, but of one among the thousands of families which supply the common needs of the country without profit and without ambition. It is, in short, private property, and its history is as private as its ownership.

The words are no sooner written than the ink turns black with doubt. Is it possible to say with truth that the parks of England are private property, and the record of their owners merely private history? Is this island so full of beauty, and her forty million folk so careless of it, that the immemorial loveliness of Gardenleigh, its high down and far horizon, its deep woods, and the stillness of its shimmering lake, are all allotted to be the portion of one man, shared only by the population of thirty-eight, who are, for the most part, members of his single household? Here, as elsewhere, the squire's courtesy and his half-open gates belie his legal title: he is a guardian of the national land, as seven and twenty squires have been before him;

holders of an office as old as any in England. For change has passed lightly over Gardenleigh since the day when William the Norman's fighting bishop, Geoffrey of Coutances, died at enmity with Rufus, and his seventy Somerset manors passed to the Honour of Gloucester, to be parcelled out among the tenants of FitzHamon and De Clare. What it was then, such in all essentials it has been ever since. Five Colthursts, five Marlands, three Romseys, twelve Silvaynes, and three of these new Earnshaws from the North, have all in turn become, by descent, by marriage, or by purchase, the stewards of the commonwealth for Gardenleigh; all in turn have lived here, planted, drained and sown, hunted, and administered the king's most rustic peace, and handed on the place to their successors unimpaired in beauty. It is true that none of them have attained high rank or lasting fame in politics, in war, or in the arts; but they have filled a definite place in English life, and a still more definite place in the history of the land of England.

And what of that land itself? What of the few hundred acres of it which the child-like Saxon in some dim century named Gardenleigh? Is it not a dream? Even as we know it, is it not the dream of seven and twenty generations? Year after year, life after life, century after century, to all who have seen it, whether as squires or serfs, natives or settlers, it has been the

fabric upon which the pattern of their days was woven —the perfect setting of high dawns and tender sunsets, of birth, and toil, and passion, and pursuit; of all joys, and many partings and inevitable death. Now they themselves are dust, or less than dust; nothing is left of them but the shrines they built, the woods they planted, the mounds in the churchyard, and a few stones, for the most part long since broken and illegible. But Gardenleigh is still as green as ever. Can it be that the dream has indeed outlasted the dreamers so utterly? Has the slow stream of human life had no effect upon these meadows that it has so long watered? Are they no richer for all this love, no more fertile to the spirit than the raw clearings of yesterday in new-discovered countries? Are there no voices but ours in these old mossy woods and sunlit gardens, no steps but ours by this lake where the stars are mirrored in silence? What, then, is Time, that he should have power to make away with the dearest memories of seven and twenty generations?

II

THE long June day was drawing towards a close, but the last hour of sunlight rested so broad and still upon Gardenleigh that every moment seemed an eternity of perfection. In the park the giant elms were slumbering, each one wrapped in its own luminous mist; in the gardens and the two grassy avenues, which run through them to east and west of the house, not a sound was heard but the cooing of wood-pigeons, across which came at last the seven strokes of the stable clock, cutting the heavy murmur like a thin, sharp blade. As the last beat ceased to vibrate, and seemed to leave the air still listening for it, the door in the verandah opened, and Aubrey Earnshaw came out upon the terrace. She stepped into such a flood of light that she hesitated for a moment, like a bather on the shore of a wide sea, then went slowly down the broad flight of stone steps, with head still bent to avoid the glare, passed between the squat round shadows of the clipped laurels, and on to the bay in which the sundial stands, at the lower edge of the terrace. Before her, down the southern slope, lay the lake, a sheet of smoothest gold among gold-green trees, the western end of it enamelled

all over with a million water-lilies, white with golden hearts. On the further side rose the steep face of the down, streaked with long deep shadows of elms and chestnuts. To the right, beyond the water-lilies and beneath the sunset, lay the two smaller lakes, the nearer one with the tiny gray church on its solitary island; and opposite the church, on the far shore under the hill, was the empty green shelf on which the old house once stood, at the foot of an avenue that marched right up the slope and crossed the down towards Selwood.

Not that Aubrey could see quite all this from where she now stood. In summer, indeed, the smaller lakes are hardly visible through the leaves of the trees that overhang them; the church, too, is deeply embowered, and the old house itself, if it were still standing, would but just peep out here and there, where its highest windows looked eastward down the valley. But she knew the place by heart: winter or summer, near or far, she saw it all—saw even that which was no longer there, that which in her lifetime had never been there. She had always regretted the fate of the old house: of course, it had become impossible; it was ruinous and costly—a patchwork of inconveniences, with its narrow fourteenth-century yard, low Tudor kitchens, and great Queen Anne front out of all proportion. Low-lying, too, and damp, no doubt, close by the water, from which

the frogs were traditionally reported to have come at times in troops to serenade the drawing-room windows. Jammed against the hill it certainly was, on a platform so much too small for pleasure ground that the gardens had always been far off, on the southern-sloping hill opposite, where Aubrey's grandfather, with mid-Victorian wisdom, had placed his commodious—or stately—mansion in the modern style.

All this was undeniable, and she had no inclination to dispute it; but the regret was there, and she often felt sorry that among her few memories of her grandfather the most vivid was that of the tone in which he would say to a guest or visitor, "It was time to make an entirely fresh start, and I made it." But here her memory served her well; she could have kept no saying more characteristic of old Joseph Earnshaw, a north-country lawyer's son, rock-jawed and iron-handed, who had made a creditable fortune at the Bar in time to retire at fifty, when he inherited the property recently purchased by his father from the creditors of the twelfth and last Silvayne of Gardenleigh. Happily, his rough ultra-masculine power was well matched by the tenderness and serene dignity of his wife, a gentle and beautiful lady upon whom the traditions of long descent seemed to lie in soft and stately folds, like ermine on the young shoulders of a queen. Her only son Walter, Aubrey's father, had the good fortune to

inherit equally from both his parents; he had a clear, direct outlook upon the world, and an irresistible courtesy of manner, a combination which made it as difficult for an inferior to deceive him as for an equal to press him too far with argument or with hospitality. In this Aubrey, of all his children, resembled him most; and now that the others had married and gone away, she easily took over the government of the house, reigning at twenty-five with more success and surety of touch than either of the sisters who had filled the place in turn during the fifteen years since their mother's death. By disposition, as well as by ability, she was well fitted to be her father's companion; she loved the historical and philosophical studies, which, with a weekly attendance at the Bench, were all that stood between him and idleness; and she succeeded, having a decided bent of her own as well, in keeping alight in him that glow of the imagination which dies down in most men at twenty-five, and is almost always dead cold by thirty—the age at which the majority, if they must go on reading, make their final choice between literature and the Press.

It was for her father that Aubrey was waiting now, as she shaded her eyes with one hand and looked down from the stone parapet towards the path that led up from the church to the garden. A crisis not unforeseen, but not to be avoided, had come upon her that

morning. Called down to prayers as usual by the crash of the gong, and passing as usual on her way by the black oak table in the hall, she had seen fate aiming at her, as the soldier sees instinctively from far off the one rifle-barrel in the row of trenches that is pointing directly at his own heart. From that table she had, in the past ten years, lifted thousands of harmless letters, with none but slight and pleasant emotions. To-day there were many lying there—three or four for her; but she had no sooner turned at the foot of the staircase than she knew that the mortal challenge had come at last, heralded by a sober, grayish envelope with a foreign stamp, and addressed to her in a handwriting that she had never seen before.

There was no sign of disturbance in her looks as she took the letter in her hand with the rest, and walked to the other end of the long hall, where the servants were already assembling. She knew what it contained: simply the acceptance of an invitation given a few weeks before, and the proposal of a near date for the visit. Aubrey and her father had been travelling home from Venice by way of the lakes and Switzerland. The merest chance — a trifling accident to the steamer which was bringing them from Como—delayed them at Varenna, and the charm of the hotel garden overhanging the water kept them there for the rest of their holiday. Chance again, in the form of a common

friend, introduced to them Stephen Bulmer, a young man of English birth and Colonial upbringing, now on his way home to settle in England after years of wandering at the heels of an eccentric father, whose death had but lately left him very much alone in the world. His name was already familiar to the Earnshaws, for they, like everybody else, had just read his last book, and had discussed it with keen if rather hostile admiration. But though neither of them inclined towards accepting his view of "The Uplands of the Future," both were quickly attracted by his personality: the father found him at once scientific and rarely sensitive; the daughter was caught by his enthusiasm, which flew colours as gallant as her own, though from an alien masthead. Secretly she likened this fearless spirit-venturer to Shelley, and might have ended by sailing far in his company if he had not unmistakably begun to clear for action, and betrayed a mind, after an acquaintance of only ten days, to leave her no choice but to fight or surrender. The obvious third course—flight—was forbidden her by pride, and by a less familiar feeling, which she did not attempt to define. But time she must have, and it was gained by an invitation to Gardenleigh. Mr. Bulmer was to suggest his own visit as soon as his plans should be settled; and they were settled accordingly, in the shortest time that could be considered a reasonable interval after the parting.

This was the crisis which was now in Aubrey's thoughts: the course of it not yet understood, the end of it hardly even thought of. But there was nothing strained or anxious in her appearance as she sat upon the lichened balustrade and looked from under her arched hand;—a figure for a sculptor, to symbolize perhaps the wisdom of the human soul, waiting in tranquillity.

III

AUBREY'S expectation was misdirected. Her father, when he came at last, came not from the sunset, but from the east avenue, and it was not until he had descended the grassy bank on to the terrace and advanced some way along the gravel path that his step broke in upon her meditation. She turned suddenly at the sound, and went to meet him with a smile full of meaning and little appearance of embarrassment. It was not to a cross-examination that she was going, but to a consultation; one of her own seeking too, and not the first of its kind. It is true that on this occasion the allies were not so well informed of each other's views as they had sometimes been; each had a sense that the affair was less purely humorous, less completely a matter of manœuvring, than ever before. Mr. Earnshaw understood his daughter, so far as such understanding is ever possible to a father, and could not quiet a dread lest this time the conflict should prove to be not between two individual wills, but between opposing forces in one nature, possibly too antagonistic for any lasting compromise. Aubrey's mood was still more

complex; she had a campaign to plan, and needed, as she had before needed, her father's sympathy and help; but she was secretly embarrassed by a new element in the problem, conscious that this time it was security for which she was really contending, and not necessarily the defeat of the invader. How was she to confess at the council table that, certain guarantees once gained, her defence might end with open gates?—how confess it to an ally whom this defence also involved, more deeply than she cared to remember? Yet hers was the paramount interest; and here, as in all things, she was absolutely free from the need or the desire to conceal her thoughts from him. They met as those who know that in each other's presence difficulties will be lightened and wits spurred to unforeseen success.

"Well, my daughter?"

"Well, my father," she echoed, "I have written."

"And what did you say?"

"I said Friday."

He took her arm and they walked slowly round the terrace towards the garden. "This next Friday?" he asked. "Isn't that rather a crowded time?"

"I wish it to be a crowded time." She had evidently thought the matter out.

Mr. Earnshaw was in no way old at sixty-two; his mind worked quickly. Was the danger then over, he wondered, and what remained only another comedy?

It was odd that the idea brought something nearer disappointment than relief; he became aware that this young man compared favourably with some he had known. But perhaps he was hasty; this was to be only a first visit, and a lengthening of the campaign would be an ominous step. He was silent for a moment, uncertain what to do next.

Aubrey seemed unconscious of his hesitation. She moved a little forward, slipping her arm from his, and stepped with one foot on to the flower-bed at her side, reaching over to pluck one of the Homer roses that hung down from the upper terrace wall. As she stood there, half hidden among the tall monkshood and young hollyhocks of the border, with her face turned a little upwards in pure profile, and her slender hand and wrist lifted to the cluster of flowers, the setting sunlight covered her with a soft glow that seemed rather to be called forth by her beauty than to be in any degree the cause or the ornament of it. Her father, as he waited and looked at her, felt a sharp pang; he was seized by the ancient, irresistible, hopeless longing of those who watch their children at certain moments—the longing for some power like that of the evening sunlight, to irradiate, to enrich, to cover with silent and infinite beneficence; an affection that, like a still deep spring, long known and drawn upon, after many quiet days suddenly wells up as if to overflow all customary

bounds, and as suddenly sinks back again within its stone circle.

Aubrey plucked her rose, and sprang lightly back on to the path to find him blinking.

"Father," she cried, with a rush of answering tenderness, "what is it?"

He smiled. The pain was gone; but, instead of replying, he put his arm round her shoulders and drew her along the path.

"Nothing that *I* can understand?" she asked, looking playfully round at him; it was an old saying of his, and to quote it was one of many fond jests between them.

"Nothing that *you* can understand," he answered in the same tone.

"Dear aged man!" she said. "But what an egotist! I hoped you would talk of my feelings, not your own."

He laughed with delight, and a little pride, at her frankness.

"So I will," he cried gaily, "if you have any feelings worth talking about."

"Of course," she said; "there are my feelings towards you, and my feelings towards my country."

"Oh!" he said, suspecting an evasion; "and what have those feelings to do with our Whitsuntide party?"

Aubrey was silent a moment, and looked down as if in reflection.

"The people who are coming here," she said, and paused, turning to look straight at him.

"Yes, the people who are coming——" said he, nodding intelligence.

"They may be expecting some kind of sympathy," she went on, "and real sympathy cannot be all on one side, can it? I like my friends to understand me; I don't care about being liked without understanding."

"Dear child," he said gently, "I know what you mean; but the time may come, for all that."

"What time?" Her challenge trembled imperceptibly.

"The time when you may have friends who will not stay to go very deeply into your feelings towards *me*."

She turned quickly and flung herself into his arms. "Father!" she cried with indignant fondness, "I have told you so often—I have sung it to you—you know I have—'Thy people shall be my people.'"

He did remember the song, and how passionately she used to sing it; but he realized now, for the first time, that it had been truth to her while it was only sound to him: a strange failure of insight, but the commonest of all divisions between youth and age, wronging now one and now the other.

"My daughter," he said, kissing her, "it is not I that will ever entreat thee to leave me."

She lifted her head, and answered with a fierceness of resolve that seemed to look past him at an unreasonable world—

"As I mean it," she said, "I will never leave you. I love what we have loved together, and I hate those who do not." She turned towards the valley and flung out her hand unconsciously towards it.

He smiled at her vehemence. "Oh! oh!" he said, "but didn't some one say, 'The brave man's fatherland is all the earth'? Gardenleigh is home to you and me, but not to every one."

"England," she cried, "is the home of *my* countrymen; and the past is all men's fatherland; he shall not deny that!" She stopped suddenly, with a little laugh to herself at the word which had escaped after all. "Come!" she said, drawing her father along, "let us go through the rose-walk and back."

At that moment a great bell began to sound vigorously in the servants' quarters.

"Oh! I must dress and do the table," cried Aubrey; and she was gone in a moment through the open door of the conservatory. Her father followed slowly, looking at his watch without seeing it.

IV

"THERE are the white cliffs!" cried a voice.

Stephen Bulmer turned sharply, and was half amused, and more than half annoyed, to find himself guilty of this instinctive movement. The chance fellow-traveller with whom he was walking the deck had turned too, and in slow American tones pressed home the point which was already pricking him.

"You'll be feeling a little sentimental," he said. "I guess those *are* the white cliffs of Old England." He spaced his words carefully, and spoke as one who knew that he was uttering a commonplace and enjoyed doing it.

Stephen hesitated; he wished to avoid the point, but he was not quite quick enough, and his tone was a very little too loud.

"Hullo!" he said. "I had no idea we were travelling so fast; these turbines are really an improvement."

"We'll soon whip you at turbines," said the American, in the same quiet, monotonous voice; "but we'll still admire your island home. I expect you find it a real quaint old place to live in?"

Stephen grasped the opportunity to explain, since he could not evade.

"I know it very little," he said. "I've been away, off and on, for twenty years—ever since I was a boy. But the quainter it is, the less I shall like it. What you call quaint I call obsolete."

The American, too, seemed to have found an opportunity. He stretched an arm and looked down upon Stephen as if from a senatorial platform.

"Sir," he said, "I understand you. This little island is what we call your country of origin; it is not your home; it is your domicile, but not your place of abode. But"—and here his voice rose in the rhetorical scale—"for all that, you may take it from me that you are English from your *sombrero* to your Broadway boots. You are bursting with insular pride, and you are too proud to show it. You are worrying all the time about your little country; your anxiety is positively ma-ternal. You want to have John Bull wake up; you want to have him hustle no end. Yes, sir, you want to have him turn his back on yesterday and spend all of to-day running after to-morrow."

Stephen frowned. He had been talking to this stranger for a quarter of an hour; he had gone some way forward with him, confided to him his watchword, invited him confidently—seeing his nationality—to share his standpoint while he sketched a new plan and

elevation for the universe, and the epitome of his own conversation with which this dry voice repaid him was too like the crude nasal travesty of the gramophone to be endurable. Besides, the man was lecturing him, and there were people looking on; another moment, and there would be an audience.

"Let us sit down," he said, "if you don't mind."

The American followed him to a seat with a humorous, imperturbable smile.

"We shall lose the view of your country," he said.

Stephen smiled too. "It's not my country I'm thinking of when I talk about to-morrow: it's the world, the race, Man himself, one and indivisible. If I spoke of any single nation, it would be yours rather than my own."

"Why so?"

"Because obviously yours is the country of the future; you are far ahead of us already."

"I guess not," said the other, seriously. "We can whip you nearly all the week, because we are better men; but we are not ahead of you."

"Then what is 'being ahead'?" asked Stephen.

"It is a term which implies time."

"But what has time to do with progress?" Stephen began to argue.

"Time," said the American, calmly interrupting, "is just the order in which events eventuate."

"I see your point," replied Stephen, smiling in spite of his earnestness, "and I agree; but you assume that all men must pass through the same stages."

"I do," said the other, gravely, preparing to count on his fingers. "See here: babies, children, boys, dudes, men, and philosophers. Some," he added, "put on their ticket philosophers first, and men after; but that is not part of your theory, is it?"

"Not just now," said Stephen, laughing outright; "I was speaking of nations: nations do not all need to go through the same phases."

"A phase," said the American, "is nothing but your present size in hats. When you are full grown I guess you'll have worn most sizes, and the biggest last, all the way through."

"Half of them misfits," Stephen broke in eagerly; "that's my complaint. If we are to progress there must be no misfits, no clinging to cumbrous fashions, among the nations of the future."

His antagonist greeted the phrase with a twinkle. "Your kind of talk," he said, "was the fashion in Premier City before I went to New York." He noted Stephen's frown with satisfaction, and went on in the same slow voice, "You are right to feel insulted, and I apologize profusely. They are raw lads in Premier City; they do not know that you must have a past before you can have a future."

Stephen was silent; the frown left his face, but he wandered away so far into a maze of thought that his companion's next remark failed to call him back. The arrival of the Customs' officer roused him for a moment; then, while the American in his turn argued over a hoard of cigars, he slipped away and began a solitary walk on the deserted space abaft the funnels.

Past and Future. To Stephen they were no light words, no hollow abstractions, but Ahriman and Ormuzd, the black and white spirits of the world. He had long seen them standing one on each side of this small Present, which is all the foothold that we have: standing at the ear of men and nations, the one offering the easy life of imitation, the futile luxury of improvidence; the other urging an austere courage and icy voyages in search of the untrodden pole. He had spent his life since boyhood in new countries, and had never found them new enough for him; they were still too full of selfishness, of dull folk serving the need or the greed of a passing day. But at least, he had thought, they were more free from the deadwood of the past; at least they did not worship decay, or endow all effete things with divine right and a perpetual pension. He was returning to England eager to take his place among the ardent, the advanced, the adventurous: no politician, but a student, as he loved to say, of the history

of the Future. His books had already cleared the way for him with the reading public; they had the singular merit of being readable, and never less humorous than earnest. In other ways he was well fitted for his chosen part: he was young for his thirty-two years, he had good health and a sufficient fortune, keen observation, a wide and miscellaneous experience, few prejudices, and unusually few encumbering ties, for he had been to none of the ordinary places of education, and of his few near relations not one was known to him by sight. On him, at least, the past had no hold. He saw himself possessed of the rarest of all opportunities, to come as a stranger to his native country, to see her with affection but without blindness, to judge her life and ideas as one who sees results but not processes, which are, he would say, the explanation perhaps, but not the excuse, of failure.

To Stephen, then, this American, upon whom he had chanced at the very threshold of his new life, was an unwelcome paradox. "Denaturalized" was the word for him: no doubt some æsthetic weakness had betrayed him to the last enchantment of the Middle Ages. Born in the New World, a possible Ulysses of the untravelled future, he had fallen before Europe, the Circe of our day, who turns the eyes of men from starry spaces above them to earthward views, earth-digging, and low contentment with husks. So ran the

peroration which, half humorously and half in earnest, he had once played off in Rome upon a co-operative travelling party of schoolmasters who had called upon him for a speech.

The ship was now in harbour; he saw his antagonist only for one more moment. When the two men sighted one another they were some little way apart, wedged in the shore-going crowd at the gangway, and moving slowly with the stream.

"A pleasant journey," said the American, with his calm, faintly mocking voice. "I am going to Canterbury for awhile."

"Down among the dead men," Stephen called back genially.

"Not so dead, I reckon—some of them," replied the other, as he nodded again and turned away.

He was a handsome, pleasant fellow, but Stephen felt somehow quite content to see him go.

"We don't even know each other's names," he reflected; "and we should never agree, so that is over."

It was over—for the American, who probably never spent another thought upon his companion of an hour; but for Stephen it was far from being over. When he had taken his place in the London train, settled comfortably down in his corner, and tossed the Canterbury pilgrim, as it were, headlong from the

window, he became aware that it was only the man, and not the idea, that he had flung away. The one he would never see again; the other he knew would meet him only too soon in a far more embarrassing antagonism.

V

FRIDAY afternoon had come, and Stephen was once more in the train. His three days in London had been too busy for much consecutive thought; and the immediate future remained wrapped in a vague but rather luminous haze. He was certain of his own wishes, and not much troubled by the fact that he was quite uncertain of everything else. Instinct told him rightly that plans would be worse than useless. The only way for a man to make love is to make himself loved; and there is no system of tactics for that. Inspiration is the one counsellor; and if the hour has struck, inspiration will not be wanting. So he dreamed rather of what he was going to see than of what he was going to do.

Still, the needle must swing to the pole; and of all that lay before him, his thought came continually back to one point. He was to meet again the woman he loved; but he realized that it would be a woman he had never seen. In Italy, Aubrey and he had been on common ground; far from home and friends, set down in the most cosmopolitan region in Europe, they had all but forgotten the existence of centuries, nations, and newspapers. Mundane affairs had become as distant as

the hills around them, and more immaterial than the poetry which supplied the greater part of their conversation. It was a time that could surely never be forgotten, he thought, by either of them; but neither could it be repeated or resumed. In her own country, in her own home, among her own people, he would find a different Aubrey, with whom his friendship must be built up afresh almost from the beginning. He must adventure not merely in a foreign land, with unknown customs, politics, and tongue, but in a region as wholly undiscovered as the moon's other face, where the contours are beyond imagination, and the lights and values are not those visible from earth. He did not doubt his own feeling; he loved her for that which was herself, and not an aspect of her. But he doubted whether the favour he had enjoyed was not more accidental. He had been tolerated, perhaps welcomed, as an unrelated fact. How would he now appear when he became a figure in the familiar landscape? A contrast he knew he must present. Would the colour-scheme cry out against him as a discord?

He did not spare himself an even more anxious thought. Hitherto he had been unopposed, possibly because, after all, he had made but little advance, possibly because Mr. Earnshaw had not honoured him with any kind of apprehension. But he was now to face a whole firing-party, and it was unlikely that every one

of them would load with blank. He would, in any event, be often at a disadvantage, often conspicuous as an outsider, often involved in a conflict of opinion with the majority. Against his own sex he was armed. He who is not at least as sure of his own wits and manners as of any other's he may meet, has not the breeding for the lists. But against a woman's whisper a man may easily be helpless, especially when that whisper has—what he cannot hope for—the right of private audience and of unrestrained expression. He dreaded a power of which he knew nothing—a power behind the throne.

The course of these reflections, briefly indicated here on a scale of about one inch to the mile, occupied Stephen for some time, and ended very abruptly. His eyes, which had been looking through the open window, and past the suburban landscape into so perplexed a future, came back for a moment to the interior of the carriage, and rested idly upon the fellow-traveller who sat opposite to him. His thoughts were still far away, and he was at first less than half conscious of the impressions which his brain had already been registering. A lady—dark, handsome, intellectual—probably eight and twenty years of age—dressed with unusual distinction. His eyes dropped again, but in so doing they fell upon her hand. It was a singularly nervous and delicate hand—almost too delicate for its load of rings; and it lay idly upon a silvery dust-cloak, holding an open

letter, which had apparently brought a deep reverie upon the reader.

Stephen had, of course, no intention of prying—indeed, the letter was for him upside down; but even in that position the handwriting could not be mistaken, and the mere sight of it affected him like the passage of an electric shock. His face flushed suddenly, and he must have made some instinctive movement, for the lady's deep-brown eyes awoke from their study, crossed his own glance and followed it downwards to the letter. She smiled, and Stephen felt himself at once in presence of a knowledge of the world before which his superiority of age completely disappeared. She spoke, and the impression was deepened; for her voice and manner were the most finished combination of sensitive courtesy, conscious humour, and armour-plated conventionality that he had ever encountered in his life. He dwindled from the stature of the thirties to the attitude of the child who has been brought down for the first time to dessert, and stands by the long dinner-table, dazzled by the lights and dresses, and abashed by the formalities of a society which is entirely beyond his experience of life.

"May I ask," said the lady, "if you are by any chance on your way to Gardenleigh?"

"I am," Stephen replied, trying hard to recover himself, but failing to achieve more than a defensive position.

"So am I," said the lady, "so let us save time by introducing ourselves." Her little laugh was the perfection of diplomatic art. Stephen felt himself gently, but irresistibly, shepherded in the intended direction. "My name," she continued, "is Eleanor Ryder, and you, I think, must be Mr. Bulmer."

"Yes," he said, and wondered at the lamb-like sound of his own utterance.

Miss Ryder, however, was apparently not relying on him for conversation: she was busy collecting her letters, sorting them, destroying some, and replacing the rest in the dressing-case on the seat beside her.

When she came to the last letter—it was the one she had been reading—she looked quickly up at Stephen.

"I ought to have added," she said, "that I am a very intimate friend of Miss Earnshaw, and that I heard from her this morning that you and I were to travel down by the same train to-day."

The change in her manner was almost imperceptible; but he understood that he was being treated with frankness and even with friendliness. The moment was not one to be let slip.

"I wish you would tell me something about her," he said.

Miss Ryder received the remark as if she expected and approved it.

"I wonder what I could tell you. You know what she looks like, you know what she reads, and a good deal of what she thinks, I expect."

"I know what she is," he replied quietly, "and something of what she looks forward to, but nothing of what she remembers. I want to know where she comes from—mentally, I mean."

"England."

"Yes; she is thoroughly English—I suppose," he added, remembering his own long exile.

"She has the national character at its best—exactly the right mixture of thought and feeling. You may not agree with me there." She spoke significantly, and waited for him to reply; but he was lost in a half-guess at her meaning, and not without apprehension. "One of the things we did not so much care about in your book," Miss Ryder continued, "was a passage in which you spoke contemptuously of people who think in order to feel, instead of feeling in order to think. In England we know that we do not think enough; but we have no doubt that we err on the right side."

"I remember the sentence," he said, "and I am inclined to stand by it. My prayer for the coming race is George Meredith's 'More brain, O Lord, more brain.'"

Her eyes lit up at the quotation. "I agree," she said. "But that does not save you, does it? if feeling is still the end, and thought the means to right feeling."

"Feeling," he replied, "always seems to me a rather selfish end to set before ourselves; thought is more likely to be concerned with the good of others."

"That," she said instantly, "is another point in your book which did not find favour: you are so ready to sacrifice the individual to the community; you would make men no better than bees."

"I am not the first to take the hive for the ideal commonwealth."

"No; and, if I may say so, I think your ideal would not succeed much better than the rest in producing happiness."

"Surely self-sacrifice may be happiness?"

"But it is only a fool's happiness if it makes no one else happy. We owe service to the State only because the State serves the individual. More brain would teach your bees that; and what would become of the hive then?"

"I gather," he said, laughing, "that Miss Earnshaw does not keep bees."

"No," she replied, laughing too, but insistent; "no, and she never will. She could not live with bees; she is too human—more intensely human than any one I know."

Stephen would gladly have pursued the inquiry further, but at this moment the train stopped, and several new passengers made their way into the

compartment. Miss Ryder sat back in her corner, and took out a book. Evidently the time for conversation was over, but during the remainder of the journey she spoke to him now and again, explaining landmarks and commenting on the beauty of the June meadows through which they were passing. Stephen, though a little grieved for his book, which he felt deserved a better defence, was full of admiration for his companion's readiness, and flattered by the interest which she had shown in him. Perhaps she had only been trying him, perhaps she had not gone beyond a benevolent neutrality; but, then, her neutrality might so very naturally have been hostile. In any case, he was only at the beginning with her, and she had made the beginning very pleasant. He was in every way content when the name of Selwood came in sight, upon a somewhat narrow and dingy platform.

VI

The train had scarcely ceased to move when Stephen, turning to the door, found himself face to face with a cockaded footman. The man addressed himself to Miss Ryder, whom he evidently knew by sight. She turned to Stephen—

"Miss Earnshaw and her father are in the town," she repeated, "and we are to pick them up on our way; but there is another guest to be found first—Mr. Laverock, the painter. There he goes," she added, as a short, sturdy figure encumbered with an armful of hand-baggage made its way towards the bridge by which the line was crossed. "If we follow him the luggage will be put over afterwards; the cart is sure to be here."

Outside the station they found Mr. Laverock standing by the door of a waggonette, introduced themselves, and were quickly driving into the town, which lies, for the most part, on the steep sides of a small natural amphitheatre. As they descended into the market-place, which forms, as it were, the bottom of the cup, Stephen looked round with a beating heart. This was the stage on which he was to see Aubrey upon her

second appearance; but there was scarcely a living creature in sight, and he was disappointed to find the scene so ill-provided with picturesque elements. It was with no regret that he saw the footman, who had entered a stationer's shop in search of his mistress, return alone and remount the box-seat with some fresh instruction to the coachman. The horses started again, and dashed with a spurt up the opposite slope to that by which they had entered, turning sharply to the left at the top of the hill into a shady road which skirted a long bank above the winding river. It was here that they overtook the walkers. The two men dismounted, and Stephen, without any feeling of real life, found himself shaking hands with a lady who, on her part, made not the faintest shade of difference between her greetings to him and to her other guest. Her eyes looked past them both at Miss Ryder, by whose side she was the next moment seated, while Stephen heard his own voice assenting with unmeaning readiness to Mr. Earnshaw's proposal that the three men of the party should continue the journey up to the house by "the walking way."

A wave of the hand, and the carriage disappeared round a bend. Mr. Earnshaw and his two companions left the road by a stile, crossed two small streams, and passed through a half-open farm gate into a footpath green with moss and overhung with small trees. It led

them towards the face of a steep southern slope, blazing with buttercups and edged with hanging woods; but before they reached the ascent they passed the entrance of a glade on the left, where the ground fell from a long spinney to the stream they had just crossed, in a curve so unexpected and so beautiful that the painter stopped short with an exclamation of pleasure. Stephen was at the moment a few steps behind the other two; he joined them immediately, but made no comment, nor did he reply to any of the enthusiastic appeals of his fellow-guest. It was not the beauty of the place which struck him into puzzled silence; it was its absolute familiarity. This part of England was unknown to him before to-day; but somehow, in a far country, in a picture, in a dream, he had seen this spot not once, but many times. Yes, many times he had looked with the same sense of repeated pleasure from the sunny meadow to the deep shadow of the hanging beechwood, under the edge of whose long sweep he had passed and repassed in a hundred summer hours of forgotten delight.

He gave up the puzzle at last, and remembered the claim of good manners.

"It is very beautiful," he said to his host. "I was wondering why I felt as if I had been here before."

"I know the feeling well," said Mr. Earnshaw, pleasantly. "It is a very vivid and curious one."

"I have heard of it," said Stephen, "but it has never come to me before to-day;" and he lapsed into thought again.

From time to time snatches of the conversation beside him crossed his consciousness, like clouds crossing an April sky and bringing each its faintly stirring breeze.

"This path," he heard Mr. Earnshaw saying, as they breasted the steepest of the hill, "was once, though you will find it hard to believe, the principal approach to Gardenleigh. Under the turf is the metalling of the Norman road. It had the merit of directness: the modern carriage road is nearly twice as long."

At the top Laverock exclaimed again. They were at the entrance of a great avenue running across a wide green table-land which seemed to be shut in on every side by woods that dipped down unseen slopes.

"How old are these trees?" he asked admiringly.

"Well," said Mr. Earnshaw, "they are not Norman, I'm afraid; but they are fairly old, and no doubt they are the successors of much older avenues in the same place."

The painter's eye roamed over the level of rough grass.

"What a place for a gallop!" he said. "It is like a natural *Circus Maximus*."

"Yes," said his host, "or a tiltyard. Aubrey likes to imagine that it was here John de Marland trained his horses before he entered for the jousts at St. Inglevere."

"Ha!" exclaimed Laverock, "is there a John de Marland in Froissart?"

"He was the last Marland of the five who lived here."

"What happened to him at St. Inglevere?"

"Oh, nothing out of the ordinary," replied his host. "He was a young squire then, and no doubt a mere child to the great French champions. But he ran his three courses with the best of them, and was only knocked over at the third."

"Good man," said Laverock. "I remember what Froissart says of some of them: 'they were noble jousters, and feared neither pain nor death.'"

They had now crossed the down and were descending the reverse slope among groups of great trees. Beneath them lay the lakes and the church on its island, and far away, from the opposite side of the valley, Gardenleigh looked across to them, its gray stone gables and mullions all yellow in the light of the westering sun.

"There is the house," said Mr. Earnshaw, "and here was the old house which my father pulled down fifty years ago."

He pointed to a grassy shelf at their feet, where a stone monument stood not far from the water-side: a plain block of squared stone from the old mansion, raised on small moss-grown steps.

Stephen, from where he stood on the steep path, looked over it down the placid level of the lake, and felt once more, with a trouble he could not understand, the haunting certainty that he had passed that way before, upon what errand and in what company he could not for his life remember.

Ten minutes afterwards they reached the house, and the feeling had passed from his recollection.

VII

STEPHEN dressed that evening more quickly than was necessary, and, entering the drawing-room at five minutes to eight, found himself the first to appear there. Laverock followed shortly after, and in answer to a question from him, described the party which was about to sit down to dinner.

"Our host and hostess, and our two selves—four; Miss Ryder—five; Hillary, Captain Earnshaw, the only son of the house, and his wife, Lady Alice; and the eighth is one of the married daughters, Mrs. Oldham. She is the wife of John Oldham, the sculptor, a friend of mine, and I'm down here to paint her portrait for him. He is away on business in Paris. They make more of his work over there than our stupid old public has ever done yet; but his day is coming, and meantime he is uncommonly lucky to have been allowed to marry one of these girls."

"Allowed!" said Stephen. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, in England the daughters of deputy-lieutenants are not usually allowed to marry artists, are they? I remember when I told the news of this engagement to old Lady Wallow, who is a distant

connection of the Earnshaws, she said to me, 'A sculptor! How very odd; but he doesn't *sell* his carvings, I hope?' 'Never!' I shouted. She couldn't think why I laughed so much, but she was quite reassured."

Stephen smiled, but the subject of Mrs. Oldham's marriage opened up more than one uncomfortable line of thought.

"So we are only eight," he said. "I thought we should be more; there are only three, then, for me to make acquaintance with."

"There'll be half a dozen more to-morrow," said Laverock, lowering his voice suddenly, as the four ladies came in with a brisk rustle, and were followed by their host and his son. Introductions were made, and the procession formed.

"There are no places to-night," said Aubrey, as they reached the dining-room; "but if Mr. Bulmer will go round to the other side and Mr. Laverock come here, we shall be right."

Stephen thought otherwise. Not only was he on "the other side" to Aubrey, but he was not even opposite to her; the table being a large one and almost round, he was so far removed that although she would probably overhear much of what he said to others, he could hardly address a word to her directly. He thought of the little tables in their Italian hotel, and

felt that circumstances were against him. Having brought Miss Ryder in to dinner, he duly began a conversation with her, but it was one with no principle of motion in it, and stopped almost immediately. Laverock on the other side engaged Aubrey, and drew the attention of all the party with an enthusiastic description of the walk they had enjoyed that afternoon. When he paused for a moment, Lady Alice turned to Stephen.

"What did you think of it, Mr. Bulmer? Which way did you come?"

"Over the down."

"And past the old house?—what is left of it."

"Yes," said Mr. Earnshaw, "we came straight from the old to the new, which I thought would be the most congenial way for him."

Stephen smiled. "Yes," he said, "I liked that way of coming."

"All good historians do," said Mr. Earnshaw, with a twinkle. "It is the scientific way."

"And what did you think of the old?" asked Lady Alice. "Not the house, of course, but the church."

"I'm afraid," said Stephen, "I did not see much of the church."

"Oh!" said Anne from the other side.

There was really nothing more than disappointment

or remonstrance in her voice, but to Stephen it seemed to match with a very faintly disdainful expression which he had already noticed on her face.

"*I* saw it," said Laverock, in a voice of cheerful self-commendation; "it has been tidied up a good deal, but I saw a north door as I looked back from this side —a really perfect door, like a private entrance to the Middle Ages."

"Mr. Bulmer will have plenty of time to see the church," said Eleanor, turning to Stephen as she spoke. "Did you like the down? You know the top of it is called Aubrey's tilting-yard?"

"Yes," he replied, with an inward blessing on her for helping him out. "Mr. Earnshaw told us about the gentleman in Froissart. I wish I knew the book."

Laverock was still with them. "When I have time," he said, "I'll paint it: the green background of well-articulated trees, the silken pavilion in front, the heralds in cloth of gold and armorial tabards, the champions with vizors down, the squires in scarlet with striped legs, the ladies all in samite and cramoisy, and the horses in long sweeping caparisons."

"No, no!" cried Aubrey; "you've got it all quite wrong. No one supposes that kind of thing ever went on there; it was only Johnny Marland's training-ground. You must imagine just a few stable-lads with the horses, and the squire trying to get them to gallop

towards each other full tilt without swerving; no armour or pageantry, but just what you might see to-morrow if Hillary took his horses up there for a breathing."

"Thank you, no," said Hillary. "If I must take a toss, I prefer the fox;" and every one laughed.

Mr. Earnshaw was waiting for a word more with Laverock.

"Aubrey and you," he said, "will never agree about that kind of thing; she is always laughing at what the old-furniture dealers call 'ye quaint medævial style.'"

"But surely," pleaded Laverock, "in the Middle Ages they *were* mediæval?"

"They were not *medævial*," said Aubrey, "they were alive."

"But quaint?" he persisted.

"No, alive; and a man's life does not reside in his clothes, except in the studio, perhaps," she added in a mischievous and audible aside to her brother.

"I say," murmured Hillary, while the rest laughed, "what price the lay figures now?"

"A hit!" cried Laverock, laughing too; "but what price the Rifle Brigade without their green jackets? and *they* are quaint enough."

Aubrey dashed to the relief of her brother's regiment.

"Not a bit," she said; "they are business-like now. When they have long been discarded, they may come to be called quaint—by the inhabitants of the future. Ask Mr. Bulmer."

"I don't know," said Stephen, brightening at the challenge. "If the inhabitants of the future take my advice they will look forward and not back; then nothing will appear quaint."

"Nothing will appear at all, I should say," rejoined Laverock.

"How so?" asked Stephen very quietly, in the manner of one who is anxious not to miss a chance of a fight.

"Apart from your book," said Laverock, "which I have not yet read, looking forward in this world is a mistake. You can never see the future till it's the present, and you can't see it well till it's the past; and it seldom is either."

"What he means," explained Hillary, "is that you are like the man who spends his time in a dark room, looking for what isn't there."

"Misquotation!" cried Eleanor.

"As you observe," said Hillary, with composure, "it is an original remark."

"It's very good, anyhow," said Laverock, "and I should like to take the vote of the company upon it. Lady Alice, would you rather that I painted you a

picture of those who have lived at Gardenleigh long ago, or those who are some day going to live there? Which would be the most worth having?"

"That depends on your imagination, doesn't it?"

"It does; and my imagination will only work on the concrete, it can do nothing with the abstract; no art can."

"I am not an artist in your sense," said Stephen; "my art is the art of government, of ordering mankind in a reasonable society. The future is the only possible canvas for that; and the whole point of my pictures is that they are definite, and deal with the concrete."

"Well," said Laverock, laughing, "I don't think *I* should make much of a living if I painted only portraits of the unborn."

"I give up that profession, then, and turn architect. You won't deny that a man may build for the future?"

"But he can't build the future: he has no bricks."

Stephen was now on his own territory; the attack was one which he was ready to meet; but he hesitated, for the argument might easily be too long and serious for a dinner-table. Eleanor saw his difficulty in a flash, and swept in to carry him forward.

"Before you say that," she replied to Laverock, "you must read Mr. Bulmer's book; it has a preface specially intended for you. I think I can put the argument," she continued, turning to Stephen, "and if I go wrong you can correct me. Mr. Laverock says we

know something of the past because we have evidence, and nothing of the future because there can be no evidence of what does not yet exist. Mr. Bulmer's point is that the building which we call the past is no longer standing or visible; it is only from small fragments, or from indications and inferences, that we reconstruct it. The new building is not yet visible either, but there are plenty of indications and inferences by which it may, he thinks, be constructed in imagination." She looked towards Stephen.

"Exactly," he said, "and with the same scientific certainty; when you know the causes you know the consequences."

'You ought to be Chancellor of the Exchequer," remarked Hillary; "you would know what a new duty would produce to a penny—and who would pay it."

"Thank you," said Stephen, in the same tone; "but no politics for me."

"Still," said Mr. Earnshaw, "Hillary's argument is worth something. When you speak of 'knowing the causes,' you must mean knowing *all* the causes. Can you possibly do that?"

"No more possibly," said Laverock, "than you can guess all the people who are to be at a party; that is why you generally don't go yourself."

"Do you always refuse a dinner invitation?" asked Hillary, quietly.

Every one laughed; Laverock had a reputation as a diner out. But he was not disconcerted.

"I should certainly refuse," he said, "if there was a chance of finding no dinner when I got there. Mr. Bulmer can't guarantee that there will ever be any future at all."

"A painter," replied Stephen, "cannot guarantee that there will ever be any picture at all; but he gets commissions."

"He doesn't get paid in advance—not this painter," said Laverock; "and I don't see why we should pay for a posterity which may never adorn our mansions after all."

"You must have a working hypothesis," said Stephen, "for any kind of life; there is reason in sacrificing yourself for even a hypothetical posterity, but there can be none in sacrificing anything for the past. What can you do for the generations of the dead; what can you be to them, or they to you? Nothing."

"*Nothing?*" said Aubrey, in a low tone that asked for no comment or reply.

The ladies rose and left the room, and Stephen felt that he had never known a conversation begin so well and end so badly.

VIII

At eleven o'clock on the following morning Stephen was pacing slowly up and down in front of the house. Across the sunny path of the terrace drifted warm floods of heavy perfume; they came from the huge wistaria, whose thick twisted stems seemed to have completely supplanted the pillars of the verandah, while its pale purple clusters hung like a living screen between them. The sky was cloudless overhead; the air was exquisitely fresh, and rang in every direction with the sweet small songs of birds. Far down the slope the lake sparkled beneath an imperceptible breeze with innumerable ripples of golden laughter. Stephen wandered to the sundial, and stood for some time idly looking down upon it. The morning was so filled with the sense of dreamy contentment that he felt a kind of sympathy for this silent recorder of sunny hours, and forgot to pass criticism upon so primitive a method of ascertaining the time of day. As he leaned there, with half-closed eyes, he distinguished among the thousand trills and chirrups with which the place was echoing one song more strenuous and passionate than all the rest. It came from the hillside below him,

where a titlark was soaring and falling above a hawthorn bush with the ceaseless motion of a fountain. Again and again, as he watched, it sprang into the air from the topmost spray, fluttered straight upwards with quick, eager notes until it reached the height of its desire; and then, spreading its wings like a tiny parachute, floated down with long, piercing cries of ecstasy to the very branch from which it had started.

"What are you looking at?" said Mr. Earnshaw's voice behind him.

Stephen pointed to the hawthorn, from which the bird was once more fluttering up as if driven by the desperate joy of some forlorn hope.

"How long do you suppose it has been doing that," he asked, "in exactly the same spot?"

"Oh," said his host, with a smile, "from father to son, for a thousand years, I dare say; custom dies hard in an out-of-the-way place like this."

"You are laughing at me," replied Stephen, laughing himself; "there are some customs which will never die."

"Song and prayer," said Mr. Earnshaw, "if those can be called customs."

"I think we agree; they will never die themselves, but surely their customary forms will change."

"Very gradually," replied Mr. Earnshaw; "so gradually as to escape the feeling of change. Association

is a large part of their essence; for their full beauty they need long time and a fixed place."

"There have been exiles," said Stephen, "who have changed their sky, but not their hearts."

"They have thought so, and they were right to lay stress upon the idea; but it was rather like consoling one's self for loss of food by reflecting that the appetite remains."

"They satisfied the appetite in other ways."

"No," said Mr. Earnshaw, "I think not; they lived on what they had, but were not satisfied. I suppose we both had the Americans in mind; would you say they had lost nothing by their departure from their ancestral home? They have made a nation, but they made it in the wilderness; many of them, when they enter an English cathedral, recognize that they have instincts which nothing in their own country can satisfy."

Stephen would have questioned this, but he was hampered by the recollection of his American friend on pilgrimage to Canterbury. He changed ground accordingly.

"I have heard a Scottish shepherd say that no service was so grand as that on the open hillside."

"The hillside where his people had worshipped for centuries."

"Yes; but he spoke particularly of the solemn

grandeur of nature; he thought more of that than of any church."

"His experience of churches was probably very limited," replied Mr. Earnshaw. "I once heard a famous preacher courageously tell a kirk full of Highlanders that they were wrong on this very point; he described the solemnity and beauty of a great ritual as incomparable with anything they had known, and he ended, I remember, with these words: 'It is true that God dwells not only in temples made with hands; but in these our ancient churches there is that which no hand can make or unmake: they are builded less of stones than of memories, and man's highest hope can be nothing if it be not itself a memory.'"

"Robert Bridges must have suggested that to him," said Stephen; "but he says it of Adam and Eve, and I have always thought he took a rather too historical view of Eden."

"He would be the last to do that," said Mr. Earnshaw. "But come," he added, "why should we stand still to talk? If you have nothing better to do, let me take you down to the church yonder; it will illustrate what I have been trying to say."

They walked down through the garden to a wicket gate in the fence which separated it from the park, and as they paused for a moment to remove the chain by which it was secured Stephen saw, to his surprise,

that the church and the small lake which surrounded it had disappeared; only the tops of the neighbouring elms were visible above a sudden rise in the undulating slope. As they advanced up the narrow path it came in sight again, and he saw for the first time the beautiful north door of which Laverock had spoken with such enthusiasm. It was very narrow, with a pointed head in the form of a trefoil, and led directly into the chancel, being intended, as Mr. Earnshaw explained, for the sole use of the priest. At this moment it was wide open, and through it could be heard the sound of the organ, played by a skilled hand.

IX

They passed between the two small lakes and over the little bridge by which the island is now united with the western shore. Mr. Earnshaw lifted the string netting which hung before the open porch, and Stephen found himself inside the smallest church he had ever seen. The cool, dim interior was refreshing by contrast with the noonday glare outside, and a breath of faint perfume came from the font, which stood close to the door, and had been newly filled with flowers. Near it, and quite at the back of the church, sat Eleanor Ryder, listening to Aubrey's chants, which, now that the practice was over and the little choir departed, rolled uninterruptedly from the chancel in a full, deep current that seemed like a reverie made audible.

The two men sat down silently, and Stephen fixed his eyes upon the organ chamber; but the spell of the music gained upon him imperceptibly, and in a very short time, though he was quite unconscious of the fact, his own outward existence and that of Aubrey herself had passed entirely from his thoughts. It was as though the life within him no longer looked out through the windows of sense, but withdrew into an inner and more real world, where he was led from depth

to depth of emotion, and brought from remorse to hope, from endurance to passionate joy, with an ever-growing sense of strength and purification. Things and events had become meaningless, action was one with feeling, and every feeling was intensified beyond measure, for it was no longer the emotion of an individual, but the consciousness of a vast unison—a unison so infinite that it seemed to gather into the beating of one heart the agony and the aspiration of all the generations of men Wave after wave, the music rose and fell, and rose and fell again, with the same long, rolling cadence, as though it had begun before memory and would continue beyond time.

But at last it ceased, and Stephen came back to the material world. As his outward consciousness returned, he found that his eyes were fixed on a mysterious, long-robed figure, which seemed to be receding from his sight along a stately chamber, in which the tracery of a golden canopy stood out against a background of deep ruby colour. The face, which was still turned towards him, was already too dim for the features to be distinguishable, but everything else about it, from the outward curves of the crozier in its hand to the chequered floor at its feet, had a clear and gem-like brightness.

"The windows are the best thing in the church," he heard Mr. Earnshaw saying. "There is no older or finer glass in Somerset."

"Who is that?" asked Stephen, with his eyes still riveted on the robed figure.

"Unknown. An English bishop and saint, as you see by the halo and crozier. It is a pity the face has perished."

Stephen was silent; he had still the curious feeling that the face had only become invisible a moment ago. He seemed very nearly to remember what it had been like before it faded.

"The abbot and the king behind you have suffered in the same way," said Mr. Earnshaw.

They turned to the west, and Stephen saw, without surprise, that the figures in that window too had not only the same faded faces, but the same strange look of life, in spite of their stiff and antiquated garments.

The rest had little interest for him, for he knew nothing of ecclesiastical antiquity. He was shown the little aumbry with its oaken door, the figures of the monk and nun on the chancel walls, whose clasped hands once supported the Lenten Veil, the Jacobean pulpit—a hexagon of brown oak carved in tiny classical arcades—and the chantry, with its broad arch and slender crockets. These things were but curiosities; they had for him no touch of reality. But he looked once more at the figure in the east window, and was glad to find that the pleasure it gave had remained with him.

He followed his host towards the door, where Aubrey and Eleanor were waiting for them.

"Has Mr. Bulmer seen the brass?" asked Aubrey.

She moved forward as she spoke, and Stephen followed her across to the north side of the church, where a single brass tablet broke the bare white space of the wall. The metal was bright, and the red and black of the lettering fresh and clear. He looked at it with a confused eye, and in the first moment perceived only that it was not a memorial of any recent event. From the centre of it an unfamiliar date stared out at him.

"But it looks quite new," he said.

"It is," replied Aubrey. "We put it up last year."

She stood reading it in silence, and Stephen knew that he was following her word for word.

IN MEMORY OF
SIR HENRY DE MARLAND
OF GARDENLEIGH, KNIGHT,
WHO FOUNDED THIS CHURCH
TO THE HONOUR OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
MCCCII
THE RECTOR OF GARDENLEIGH
COVENANTING THEREUPON
FOR HIMSELF AND HIS SUCCESSORS
THAT THE SAID SIR HENRY
HIS ANCESTORS AND POSTERITY
SHOULD RECEIVE THE BENEFIT
OF ALL PRAYERS AND ORISONS
TO BE SAID OR SUNG HEREIN
FOR EVER.

It is probable that at another time Stephen would have passed this inscription by, or numbered it among the curiosities which had so little interest for him. But no such indifference was possible now; he could not doubt that there was something here which was near to Aubrey's heart, and, simple though the words were, he perceived as he read them for the second time that they had been composed not only with care, but with insight, and had sprung of the very mood into which the deep, unending roll of the chant had so lately thrown him. He seemed to hear the music again in the final words—the very cadence of the prayers and orisons "to be said or sung herein for ever."

"I am sure you wrote that," he said quietly to Aubrey; and he saw as he turned to speak that she was holding Eleanor's hand in hers.

"No," she said; "the words are the words of the original deed. We don't write like that now."

"After six hundred years——" he began, and stopped.

Aubrey turned away, and they all left the church. For once she had done him an injustice.

X

OUTSIDE, they parted company: the ladies returned by the direct path to the house, while Mr. Earnshaw invited Stephen to continue the walk with him and make the circuit of the lake.

"I hope I have not tired you," he began; "but we have so little to show our guests here, that every one has to see the church."

"I enjoyed the music more than I can say," replied Stephen, "and I thought the church beautiful; but I did not venture to praise it, because I know absolutely nothing about these things."

"You have had no opportunities; but you will have to study churches now, I suppose? They come into your period."

"Into my period?" said Stephen, smiling. "Do they?"

"You have not abolished religion in the future—at least so far as you have gone at present?"

"Oh no; but these churches are the embodiment of a Church—with a capital C—and I am not sure about Churches of that kind."

"I noticed that in your book you treated the subject with what I must call a masterly inactivity."

Stephen looked up; the glance he met was humorous, but none the less kindly.

"To be frank," he said, "I do not know what to do about the Church."

Mr. Earnshaw smiled insistently. "But you are bound to know," he said; "it is your business to know."

Stephen's heart quickened; he had all but reached this point a dozen times before, both with Mr. Earnshaw and with Aubrey herself; he had felt it to be dangerous ground, and had extricated himself every time with painful and not very successful efforts. But he realized that the difficulty was not one which could be permanently avoided; it formed part of the crisis which he had come here to face; his quest led him directly through it, and there could be no way round. He stopped short in the path.

"This is not a bad place for a rest," said his host, pointing to the stump of a fallen poplar by the water-side, and stepping across the grass to take his seat upon it.

Stephen followed, but remained standing by him, and mechanically driving the ferrule of his stick into the ground at his feet.

"The truth is," he began tentatively, "I am so uncertain of my audience."

"Afraid, do you mean, of offending the public?"

"No, not quite that. I can face a prejudice, or I should never write at all. But on this point there are so many prejudices to face at once; it is like arguing with the hydra in a hundred languages at the same time."

"Argue with me, then; I have only one head."

"But in what language?"

"In any language, so long as it is serious," said Mr. Earnshaw. "I am a Churchman, but you need not fear that my orthodoxy will be shocked by any reasonable argument."

Stephen drew a long breath and plunged. "Well," he said, "I try to see everything in as generalized a form as possible before admitting it to my new world. Religion I can place there, because it is a universal, an inclusive element; but a Church is particularist and exclusive by its very nature. A reasonable, scientifically ordered community, if it were given anything like a fair start, would never allow such an influence to get a hold at all."

"I follow you," said Mr. Earnshaw: "the Churches, taken all together, are a terrible satire on the idea of the Church. But all Christendom has belonged to one or another of them. Why is this, do you think? and why should this be not the case in the future?"

"Men have always desired incorporation; it is in their nature to wish to have something larger behind

them—some great body to which they can refer themselves."

"Why should that natural feeling cease?"

"Because it is in reality, like patriotism, not essential."

"Patriotism has certainly changed," said Mr. Earnshaw; "it is less concentrated now than it probably was in more tribal days, and I, for one, rather regret the fact. But supposing that patriotism must widen until it ultimately disappears, I think you are overlooking a real difference in using it as an analogy here. Patriotism is essentially defensive. It will be impossible, you say, in a world-state, because a world-state can have no enemies. But a spiritual communion among men can never be useless, for in the spiritual world man will always be at war."

"I should not myself use the word 'war,'" replied Stephen; "it seems to imply personal opponents—Powers and Spirits of the nethermost abyss."

"I had no such intention," said Mr. Earnshaw; "I was thinking of the *strenue militantes* of Thomas à Kempis—the warriors who have overcome the world. You don't deny that life is a conflict, in which man needs all the help he can find?"

"No. But surely, if it is to be a force stronger than his own, he must seek it from a higher power, not from his fellow-man."

"Then we are all to live entirely separate lives—each in his narrow cell for ever laid?"

"No, no," said Stephen, earnestly; "that is the opposite of my belief. I look to see men helping one another as they have never helped before; but it will be mainly in the ways of science—in clearing away obstacles and tangles and dangers, and giving a fair field to 'original goodness,' which is, at least, as natural and as visible as original sin. I do not say that goodness may not be fostered, too, by fellowship; but I do say that the fellowships which at present exist for that object seem to have done far more harm than good."

"It is difficult to think without enthusiasm," said Mr. Earnshaw, "of the cause of science and the service by which it has been forwarded. But hitherto it has done but little for the clearing of man's spiritual path, because it has hardly yet recognized the existence of spiritual phenomena at all. It recognizes flowers," he continued, pointing to the water-lilies which covered the bay at their feet, "because they are substantial; they appeal to the common senses of all men; they float on water, grow on stalks, and are rooted in mud. But it turns away from our mental experiences, as inconsistently, it seems to me, as though it should refuse to recognize those slender bars of turquoise that you see coming and going upon the water-lilies—mere flashes of momentary light from nowhere."

"Yes," said Stephen, "dragon-flies and dreams should all come in. But the scientific people have developed a dogmatism of their own; they have founded the Materialistic Church, and it is showing the characteristic faults of all Churches."

Mr. Earnshaw was silent for some time, looking out across the lower expanse of the lake. Stephen sat quietly down by his side, and wondered what was the train of thought which he had set in motion. If he had only known it, he had been fortunate beyond his best hopes. His chief wish had been that he might not say anything that would jar fatally upon his host, or reveal an impassable gulf between his own feelings and those which were probably Aubrey's as well as her father's. His success had been greater than this; he had touched Mr. Earnshaw's memory, and set in motion one of those currents of vivid feeling which bring to the old so quick a sympathy with anything spoken in the language of their own youth.

"My dear boy," he said—and Stephen was startled by the unexpected change in his voice—"thirty-five or forty years ago I too had my quarrel with the Churches. My father was a Protestant of the Protestants, and the set in which I was brought up seemed to me, when at last I came to think of religion apart from discipline, to have no conception of religion at all. Their views were historical, rational, practical, and moral; they

treated life as one prolonged meeting of an ethical society. Their proceedings bored me as a boy, and as an undergraduate I came to find them guilty of something like a fraud. They had enthusiasm, or at least fervour, and they professed to worship a superhuman will; but their creed was an arid one: it offered no mitigation of the sandiness of life, no wells for the spirit in the desert of material facts. At the moment of my revolt I fell in love with a very young girl, whose father, while he lived, had been the head of an old Roman Catholic family. Her mother evidently liked me, and encouraged my visits, in the plainly expressed hope that I might become a convert to the true faith. For a time I was extremely happy; I read the mystics, and felt that I had found the inheritance which had been concealed from me."

"And then?" said Stephen, after a pause.

"There was no 'then'; the crisis which would have confirmed me never came. My father, who was the shrewdest man I have ever known, and had an iron nerve, not only made no opposition to my wishes, but of his own accord offered me an adequate provision for marriage. There was, consequently, no haste upon the other side; my instruction proceeded, and for a whole year I saw the Roman Church mirrored in the life of a household, and especially in the unconscious

mind and conversation of a girl of seventeen. No doubt the view presented to me was a crude one, but it was a view from the practical side; and when my mind had had time to recover its analytical powers, I felt as if I had been deceived by a mirage. That is not my opinion now. I do not doubt that in the Roman communion, as in any other, the living water may be found; but I still see the practical dangers involved in the system as clearly as when they first astonished and repelled me. The first principle of Romanism is surrender: readily accepted by the feminine temperament, and welcome even to the masculine when presented under the aspect of service; but I found that the surrender demanded is, in practice, surrender to a human, not a Divine, will, and the service is primarily the service of a human power. Then the mystery, the perpetual remembrance of the unseen world, which attracted me so strongly at first, seems, in the Roman mind, to pass downwards into a still more fatal perversion. The centre of the system is not the thing itself, the Life upon which all spiritual life must feed, but the symbol through which that Life is to be attained; and this symbol cannot be used except by the hand of a miraculously gifted priesthood. The Presence of the Universal is not only localized, but controlled; and the desire for it is made a lever for subjecting the whole life of mankind to the direction

of a caste—with what results may be seen in the history of nations and of science."

"Ah!" exclaimed Stephen; "but surely we have done with the Middle Ages?"

"When you say that—I know what you mean—you are putting a part for the whole. Our forefathers were no more unanimous than we are, and no more submissive. The claim of the true Churchman was the same then as now: equally strong in logic, equally fatal in practice; and contested, at any rate in England, in much the same way as it is contested now. The struggle must go on; the elements of conflict are the diverse characters of men. There will always be these types—the purely secular mind, which looks only to the practice of life in an obviously material world; the nature which desires above all to unite itself with the Divine, and accepts a Church as a means to that end; and that fanatic character, in which religious feeling is overlaid by a disproportioned devotion to the Church herself. You remember it was said of the Emperor Ferdinand, that if a priest and an angel were to visit him at the same moment, he would make obeisance to the priest first, and to the messenger of Heaven afterwards; and Ferdinandism is not dead yet, even in the English Church. No, the Middle Ages are not past; but they were never present in the way you imagine. The church you have just seen—

this little church of Gardenleigh—is a proof of it. The founder, Sir Henry de Marland, may have been a religious man, but he was certainly a stout anti-clerical, and I don't suppose the parson stood up to him out of church any better than a poor modern rector does to the man to whom he owes his living, especially when the patron is a county magnate and a distinguished soldier, as Marland was."

"I have not yet got used," said Stephen, "to your way of speaking of these ancient inhabitants. To me their names suggest stiff stone figures on dilapidated tombs; to you they seem to be in no way different from the people in this year's red book."

"Oh yes," said Mr. Earnshaw, standing up, "very different; I know so much more about them. People in the red book are mostly names to me; I cannot bring them before my eyes as human beings. But these Marlands, for instance—they lived here where I live, and faced all my problems before me; their records are a little condensed, but quite as informing as any that I shall leave behind me. I will show you the book of the manor if you like: my notebook of dates and documents."

"It will be a new line for me," replied Stephen, politely; "I have not dealt much in dates or documents hitherto."

"No," said Mr. Earnshaw, as they walked on; "the Future is not strong in dates."

He laughed, Stephen thought, with an easier manner than usual, and the rest of the walk passed pleasantly in more trivial conversation.

XI

In the mean time Aubrey and Eleanor had returned to the garden.

"Let us not go indoors yet," said Aubrey, as they reached the gate; "the hour before lunch is all we have left. When the others arrive we shall never get a moment to ourselves."

Eleanor was an expert in all the diplomatic arts: she could, without the least hesitation, read off a cipher message, or translate her own thoughts into the form of language most suited to her hearer's mood. As they turned into the rose-garden and walked slowly beneath the long alley, she carried on both these processes at once. She began by opening the conversation directly upon Stephen, for this was obviously the topic for which an opportunity was desired.

"Mr. Bulmer enjoyed your music, I think; it was lucky they happened to come in just then."

Aubrey sighed.

"Why do you sigh, dearest?"

"Life is such a tangle."

"There's only one way of unravelling a tangle, is there? You must lay out the threads as clearly as you

can, and see which way they go, before you try to pull them."

"I've done it," said Aubrey, with a face of humorous despair; "and the clearer they came out the worse I felt."

Eleanor knew exactly what this meant. "I don't understand," she said gently.

"You will very soon," replied Aubrey, leaning heavily upon her arm. "Eleanor," she said, with sudden emphasis, "what do you think of him—not in detail, but what do you feel?"

"I like him."

"How much?"

"I like him a good deal now, and I can imagine liking him a good deal more when I have known him longer."

Aubrey was silent. "The worst of it is," she said reflectively, after a pause, "that I have known him so much longer than you have."

Again Eleanor played the simpleton. "Then you don't agree with me?" she asked.

Aubrey shook her arm. "You old serpent," she said; "you know what I mean, and I know what you mean. You want me to tell you the difference between his feelings and mine, if there is any. It is a horrible thing to explain, and this is just the time for it—half-past twelve in glaring daylight."

"Let us wait—do let us wait—there will be time this evening."

"No, I must say it while I see it. It is all *there*—before my eyes," said Aubrey, raising her left hand and clutching the air. "Here is a man who likes me; and I like him, at any rate, better than I did. He thinks that enough; I do not."

"It is enough for most people."

"You know it cannot be enough for me; I am not 'most people.' I have had *you* for all these years, and I am not to be bought with less than you have given me."

Eleanor laid her hand on Aubrey's. "Dearest," she said, rather sadly, "you must not forget that he is offering you what is out of my power to give."

"I forget nothing; but I cannot balance the account between you two like that. The bargain is between him and me, and you must see how unequal it is; he claims to have the best of it both ways. He has the stronger feeling to begin with, and then he expects to get twice as much sympathy as he gives."

"Well," replied Eleanor, in a tone of concession, as if yielding to argument, "I certainly do think he might be a little more of a supplicant under the circumstances. It is his attitude that is rather unreasonable."

"That is hardly fair," said Aubrey, quickly; "he is

quite unconscious, at any rate. A man does not think of his attitude; he simply knows what he wants, and goes the shortest way to get it."

Eleanor smiled to herself. "He may be unconscious," she said. "I hope he is; but that does not make his demands any less exacting. You seem to have entered into his interests thoroughly; he does not even try to appreciate yours."

"But I cannot give him that for an answer."

"Certainly not!" thought Eleanor, with a nod to her own confidential reflection. "I cannot see why you should not," she said aloud.

"Eleanor! you know there is only one reason that a woman can possibly give."

Eleanor looked her in the face; she could dare much, but she could not dare to thrust home with "Give it, then."

Aubrey read her eyes and flushed. "If you think of it," she went on hurriedly, "with any sense of humour, how can I put it as a bargain, and a bargain for opinions too, as if they were at command? 'Dear sir,' I suppose I should write, 'I am obliged by your kind offer; the castle would suit my requirements fairly well if it had more outhouses. Perhaps you could see your way to building these?'" Her voice fell from mockery to discouragement again. "No, no, it is a tangle; whichever way I turn I lose."

"Perhaps I could do something," said Eleanor, as if musing on possibilities.

"Could you? No, that would never do; that is not what I feel I want. I want him to go on being unconscious—yes, he must be quite unconscious; but if I could *make* him see with my eyes and think my own thoughts. It is my own fault that he does not. I know I have a power over him if I could only use it in the right way. If I could only take him right out of his own world and into mine!"

Her lips trembled, and she smiled faintly at her own vehemence.

"You can," said Eleanor, soothingly; "I am sure you can. "I think you did quite take him away with you when you were playing just now."

"The music did, perhaps; but he cared little enough for the things I wanted him to understand."

"I am not sure of that," said Eleanor, with a gentle pressure of her arm upon Aubrey's. "Perhaps there were too many of us there. It is a pity," she went on more lightly, "that you can't just lure him back into the fourteenth century for a time."

"I will," she replied, "if he will come."

"Oh, he will come," said Eleanor, as they turned into the avenue; "I will answer for that. You have often taken me there already."

XII

It was exactly half-past one when Stephen left his room at the summons of the gong. As he came to the head of the staircase the hideous braying died away, and gave place to a chorus of childish laughter, a sound that could never fail to move his heart. He hastened down to the half-landing, and almost stopped as he turned the corner and came in sight of the group in the hall below him. On a long divan which faced the foot of the stairs sat Mrs. Oldham, no longer cold or scornful, but as fresh and beautiful as the summer day itself, in the Romney dress and shady hat in which she had been sitting for her portrait. By her side and at her knees clustered a group of children, four in number, but for the moment as uncountable as the chequers in a kaleidoscope or the struggling heads at the opening of a nest.

"Oh, do let us! oh, do, do let us!" they were clamouring; and the mother-bird's head bent graciously over each in turn, whispering a secret word and drawing back with a quick flash of bright eyes and a light, playful turn of the head.

"Oh no! not 'perhaps,'" they all broke out again

in chorus. The smaller of the two boys came in late for the chime. "Not praps," he said, screwing up his face with appreciation of his own droll mimicry, "but anything-you-like-and-don't-bovver; that's what Nanna says."

The Romney lady rose to her feet. "Mr. Bulmer," she said, laughing, "I don't think you've made the acquaintance of the most important part of the household. This young comedian is our future lord and master—Worlter, he calls himself—and this is his sister Cynthia, my brother's eldest child. The third is a baby; and these are my two," she continued, drawing forward an older boy and girl. "George is seven, and Margaret is six. Shake hands with Mr. Bulmer, both of you; he is a very wise gentleman, and knows exactly what is going to happen before it happens."

Margaret opened a pair of deep blue eyes very wide, and stood gazing at Stephen in silence. George was bolder and more practical; he clung to Stephen's hand with both his own, and leaned back with upturned face to question him.

"Do you know what is going to happen this afternoon?" he asked.

"Ah!" said Stephen, in a deep, mysterious voice.

"No, but do you really? Mother won't tell us, you know; she won't tell us if we are going to pick bees after dinner."

"Going to do what?" asked Stephen, in astonishment.

"You see how unreasonable they are," said Anne, laughing, whether at them or him was not clear.

"If you do pick bees," said Stephen to the children, "I can certainly tell you what will happen this afternoon: you'll be stung."

The chorus burst forth again in a perfect scream of laughter, at the end of which came once more Walter's slow, full accentuation.

"They's not buzz-bees," he said; "they's grass-bees." His face puckered with humorous contempt.

"I haven't the faintest notion what they mean," said Stephen to Mrs. Oldham.

"Bee-orchises," she replied, "they grow in certain places in the park, and the children have been promised by their grandfather that he will take them out some time to look for them. They want me to ask him if to-day may be the day; but I don't suppose he will have time before his other guests arrive."

"No, no, mother; no, no," cried the children. "Not before they come; we can't go without the cousins."

"That is another difficulty," Anne explained. "My sister is bringing her two little girls, and they must come too; they cannot be here till four."

The rest of the party were now straggling in, and luncheon began, the children being allowed for this one day to fill the places at the long table which had been

made ready for the larger company expected at dinner. They were as quiet as mice, but their presence had its effect: the conversation was more broken, and even the vivacious Laverock showed no inclination to be disputatious. Stephen was pleased to find that although Walter had treated him with scorn and Cynthia with complete indifference, he was already on good terms with George, who sat next to him, and an object of interest to Margaret opposite, whose wide, wondering eyes were never lifted from her plate except to be fixed upon his face. Before they went upstairs for their midday rest, they had formally invited him to be of the bee-picking party, to which grandpapa seemed disposed to give his consent. It was an affair of five minutes only, he explained in an aside to Stephen; the flowers, if they were to be found at all, were almost within sight of the terrace.

To the children, however, it was a great expedition, and by four o'clock they were all armed with their tiny baskets and skirmishing about the courtyard in expectation of the arrival of the cousins. Fortune favoured them, for when the carriage came at last it contained only Mrs. Saltwode and the two little girls; nurse was following with the luggage, and Uncle Philip—Mr. Saltwode—was walking through the park with Captain Warburton. Lady Barlaston was driving over later in the afternoon from the house of some distant neighbours

with whom she had been staying. There was, therefore, nothing to keep grandpapa indoors, and the half-hour remaining before tea was given up to the rapture of the hunt.

Dorothy Saltwode herself led it. She was the most beautiful of Mr. Earnshaw's three daughters, a creature of the sun and air, living in swallow flights, never twice the same, never ceasing her insatiable quest for beauty and delight. She had scarcely alighted in her sister's arms before she was through the house and out upon the verandah and down on to the terrace, kissing a cluster of wistaria as she passed, like a wayward zephyr. The children followed, stumbling and shouting, and by the time Mr. Earnshaw and Stephen reached the path the whole party of children, mothers, and aunts was streaming away along the cool, green level of the east avenue like a rout in some Elizabethan Masque of Summer.

At the gate they stopped for breath, and the children clung about their grandfather, who began to assume an air of mystery. He led them along the slope below the carriage road until they came within sight of the little path which leads off from it down to the boathouse. In the angle between the two stood a small clump of trees, with a little scattered undergrowth beneath and around them. This was the haunt of the bees, and the hunters were instructed in whispers to

creep upon them silently and stealthily. The directions were for the space of half a minute faithfully observed; then George, perceiving that his sister was tiptoeing straight towards a flower without seeing it, flung himself before her with a yell, and both rolled over. The rest followed with a rush, and Dorothy flew to help. After all there were but three sprays to be found, but these were brought back in triumph to Mr. Earnshaw, where he sat on the grass above with Stephen and Eleanor, laughing at the scene before him.

"When I was their age," he said, "my father showed me these flowers; I can hear his voice at this moment calling down the hill to my sister. Twenty years ago I brought my own children to this same place, just as I have brought their children to-day; and so it goes on." He ended with a half-sigh.

Stephen was looking curiously at a fine "bee" which Margaret had brought back and offered to him.

"It is really a bee, isn't it?" he said, surprised by the appearance of the flower, which he had never seen before. "I did not know bees could turn into flowers."

The child stood still, with wide blue eyes gazing level into his.

"But mother says," she replied, in her clear, earnest little voice, "that you know everything that is going to happen, before it happens."

"Not quite everything," he said; "only some kinds of things."

She came a little nearer. "Do you think," she asked, with a great effort, "that you could know something for me?"

"Tell me what it is." He put an arm about her and drew her to him.

"When shall we all wake up?"

Stephen did not understand. "Are we asleep?" he asked.

"Yes, you know, we are all asleep, and we've all got to wake up some day—mother and George and grandpapa and every one. Do you think we could all wake up together?"

Stephen felt the slow, clear words falling like magic drops upon the eyes of a dreamer. For a moment he saw the vision of a timeless existence, a life without age or separation, a world where none can be forgotten. Tears sprang to his eyes, and he rose quickly to his feet, holding out a hand to the child.

"Yes," said Mr. Earnshaw, rising too, "it is time we thought of tea; this generation has picked its bees."

XIII

PHILIP SALTWODE was some years older than the rest of Mr. Earnshaw's family circle, and had already sat in three Parliaments. He belonged to the Conservative party, which had been in power for practically the whole of that period, and promotion had not yet come to him in the form of office; but he had long been distinguished by the intimacy of several of his chiefs, and was private secretary to one of them. His capacity for this kind of work was very considerable, but his future was a little compromised by his fondness for ideas. His interests were, in fact, those of a philosopher rather than what is called a practical politician; but if his prospects suffered by this, he found great consolation in the whispers which would brand him as a "dangerous" young man. Of all the party now at Gardenleigh he was probably the one who had read Stephen's book with most care; for though the author's views had not for him the personal interest that they had for Aubrey and Eleanor, he assigned to them a much higher place among opinions of public importance.

After dinner, when the dining-room was deserted for the verandah, he seated himself by Stephen, who

turned to him with pleasure, attracted already by his intellectual face and unconventional charm of manner.

"I don't want to ask an indiscreet question," Saltwode began; "but if you are thinking of taking any part in political life, it would interest me very much to hear about it."

"I can only say," replied Stephen, readily, "that I am unconscious of any such inclination at present; but I am always glad to talk politics, especially English politics, about which I have very little first-hand information. I don't count the newspapers."

"Well," said Philip, "if it were merely information that you wanted, in the ordinary sense of the word, the press has never been so well informed as it is now. But I take it your inquiry is really one into principles, and in that case the less you read about tactics the better."

"You make me feel very unfledged," said Stephen. "I suppose principles are a kind of juvenile ailment in the life of a politician?"

"Not in my opinion," replied Philip, seriously. "The party division is to me as real as the difference between the sexes; and when a mind is once established in either class it can never change—except in abnormal instances, which are generally cases of degeneration or of fraudulent disguise."

"May I ask," said Stephen, laughing, "to which political sex you yourself belong?"

"The masculine—what we call the Conservative."

"Why the masculine?" asked Stephen. "I have always thought of Conservatism as the passive element."

"That is the common idea; and it is true that the Conservative party must naturally include all the timid, senile, and old-womanish minds of the community. But they are under the same misconception as yourself, if you will forgive me for saying so. They take Conservatism to be the creed of immobility, the cause of crystallization. But obviously that is impossible; the *status quo* has never been, and can never be, preserved. A mere 'stop-the-clock' party would perish in a year—that is, as soon as it became evident that it had entirely failed to stop the clock."

"Oh, oh!" said Stephen; "do you deny that there has ever been such a thing as a reactionary party?"

"Reactionary is only a nickname for Conservative; the fundamental principle implied by both is loyalty to the past, admiration of the past, imitation of the past. But the past was no more static than the present is; those were living trees which our ancestors tended, and under which they sat. They change, of course, because they grow; but it is our business to see that they remain in their places, and are not cut down or rooted up in favour of others which are not indigenous."

"I accept your simile," replied Stephen, "and I ask you what you propose to do when your trees no

longer give you adequate shelter; when they are leafless at the extremities, and decayed in every branch and hollow at the core."

"Radicalism," said Philip, smiling, "is the creed of the faddist with the axe. He has always gone about seeking what he may cut down, and naturally he magnifies the decay and minimizes the surviving utility of every institution that comes in his way."

"Is it your position, then," said Stephen, "that he is always wrong—that the moment will never come for a radical operation?"

"I do not venture to prophesy," replied Philip, "but I say that in England the moment has never yet been in sight when a sacrifice of the kind was called for."

"I am no historian," said Stephen, "but I should have thought that feudalism was in a fair way to be forgotten."

"Never less so. You have been misinformed by the painters and poets and pessimists, who call us degenerate because the armoury of our invincible forefathers is hung in our halls and not on our backs. So it was in 1805; so it was in 1815; so it always has been. The picturesque is always obsolete; but the spirit of the thing, the love of war and sport, and the religious regard for the weaker—that is more alive than ever it was."

"Not quite so effectively, is it?" asked Stephen. "The Germans claim to be able to beat you in war, and the Americans in athletics."

Philip smiled disdainfully. "That 'you' betrays the exile," he said; "but not more clearly than the argument does. Somebody has always been beating us. It is in our blood to desire the Olympic dust more than the Olympic crown; and there are, as you say, certain other nations who seek victory with long odds rather than a fair fight against the strong. We don't win oftener than others—we never did—but we forget our defeats, and they brood over theirs." He threw his cigarette away and took another. "By the way," he began again, "we are a long way off the track; we are talking about chivalry, which is only a concomitant of feudalism."

"Yes," said Stephen, "I was going to bring you back to that. You have to persuade me that this aristocratic-looking English system is not what it looks to me—a modern dynamo-house with a row of wax-works outside in gaudy robes and tinsel coronets."

"I admit the tinsel and deny the waxworks. We love tinsel; in our climate it does something to make glad the heart of man, and we know that it does not prevent the workman from doing his work well."

"If he is really a workman and not a waxwork. But if you choose him for the coronet?"

"Yes, yes," said Philip, "that is the idea; but we don't, and we never have. You see, in this country we are real believers in equality. We don't reject a man because of his class or surname. Even if he is born a Howard, he may yet rise to be a post-office manager."

"Good!" said Stephen, laughing; "but he has to rise. The feudal system saved him that trouble by making birth and power the same thing."

"Pardon me," said Philip, "but you must really let me contradict you there. In the Middle Ages they thought nearly as much of birth as we do; but they annexed power not to birth, but to property. They deprived a duke of his dukedom for being poor."

"I did not know that," replied Stephen; "but it was surely only the precaution of a privileged class, anxious for its own prestige."

"Possibly; but it was strictly in accordance with feudal principles. The system was simply an organization of the resources of the country for the use of all. Every one had his place, his duty, and his living wage. A and B had the land and titles, and C and D and the rest of the alphabet had a definite claim upon them for housing, food, and employment. They have very foolishly exchanged it for an indefinite claim for charitable patronage, in order that they may be free to boast of their independence."

"Oh," replied Stephen, "they are not all paupers, surely; and they have a vote."

"They have; but the individual has little, if anything, more than he has always had; the power is not with him, but with the head of his organization. He used to be represented by his Lord. Lord and Villein they are still, though we call them Capital and Labour in modern English."

"But Labour has its own organization now."

"Not for production; only for revolt. That is the uncomfortable stage which we have reached; but it cannot last."

"Still less can it lead back to feudalism."

Philip smiled meaningly and looked at Stephen. "I can tell you with some confidence about that," he said, "for I have studied the works of Bulmer, our most trustworthy sociologist. The present state of things is leading us back, or rather leading us round, to the old idea of an organized community. In that community every man will have a place, a duty, and a living wage, and also a further reward, proportionate to his value. The tinsel, which with your leave we shall preserve, because we like it, will adorn the brows of those who fill the higher and more responsible places. Wealth in reason will be permitted too; but it will never be acquired by mere chance, or held without definite obligations. Those who do the best part of the

most intelligent work will be enabled to live the most dignified lives."

"I recognize the sketch," said Stephen, "and I am very glad that it appeals to you; but I must tell you that my method was simply to draw it as different as possible from anything that has existed, or now exists, in England."

"It is a happy failure, then," replied Philip, "for it represents very attractively the ideal of State Socialism, the system from which we have come, which we have never entirely abandoned, and to which we are inevitably returning."

"It is a pretty paradox," said Stephen. "But I need no conversion; you must try it on your Conservative friends."

"I thought you would say that," replied Philip, with an appreciative smile, "and I confess that you hit me hard. There are no hindrances like those of one's own household. The Conservatives shy at the very name of Socialism, because they own most of the great fortunes and titles, and they fear either to lose them or to have them burdened with hard-and-fast responsibilities. The Englishman loves duty, but hates obligation."

"I should like to ask Mr. Earnshaw," said Stephen, seeing his host approach at this moment, "which of the two great parties is, in his opinion, the more likely to coalesce with the Socialists."

"If bidding were buying, I should say the Conservatives," replied Mr. Earnshaw; "but in some bargains there are other considerations beside the mere price."

"The Socialists," said Philip, "are not selling an old horse to a kind home."

"No," said Mr. Earnshaw, when they had all done laughing, "they are not looking for affection, but they are looking for success; and they will find it by joining the party which is least handicapped by devotion to system. So long as socialistic measures come singly and are purely opportunist, there is apparently no limit to the amount we can absorb; for, among Englishmen, the best individualist is at heart the best fellow-citizen. But your German system spoils all for us. When logic comes in at the door, persuasion flies out of the window."

"My father-in-law is incorrigible," said Philip to Stephen; "it is an old quarrel between us."

"It is a quarrel older than we are," replied Mr. Earnshaw; "it is as old as that"—he pointed to the long, silent slope of the park, where the cattle were wandering in the moonlight.

The spell of the summer night fell upon the three men, and they sat for some time without a word, their thoughts all following the same train. For the first few moments the scene had a strange air of unreality; they saw the hills and trees and silvered water as

things which had been enchanted from life into tapestry; but soon they themselves were bound with the same magic. This alone was real, and to think again of their politics was to look from far off upon the transient and dusty struggles of a half-forgotten world. Is it possible, they wondered, that such things are still in issue

"Yes," said Mr. Earnshaw at last; "there is nothing new under the moon. Let us go in." And he led the way into the house.

XIV

Sunday morning brought a still more dazzling sky, a warmer air, and a deeper contrast everywhere of sunlight and shadow. The year seemed to have done with birth and transition; roses fell and roses opened, but there was no longer any sign of change, any reason for doubting that summer was to be eternal.

Stephen passed the morning in the west avenue, sitting under a huge elm tree, whose upper canopy towered a hundred feet above him, while the lowest branches, rough and ponderous as the knees of a giant, bent down almost to the mossy turf, and were supported there on stools of wood nearly as green and uncouth as themselves. He had a book with him, and was resigned to solitude; for Aubrey had disappeared from the breakfast-table with the explanation that she was going to the Sunday-school, and Mr. Earnshaw had suggested that if he did not wish to attend church twice in the day, he would find it more convenient to wait till the afternoon service at Gardenleigh, and so escape the longer walk to Croonington. It occurred to him that as some of the ladies were intending to make this journey—and at least two of them had already

made it before breakfast—it could hardly be too far for his own powers; but he thought his host might possibly have some reason for wishing to arrange his day for him, and, since Aubrey was already out of the way, he readily acquiesced.

Mr. Earnshaw's motive had merely been a desire that his guest should feel free to do as he pleased; the tradition of Sunday at Gardenleigh was strongly against compulsory service. His suggestion, however, brought in its train another advantage, which he had not foreseen.

The "Earthly Paradise" lay open on Stephen's knees; he had read one of the sweet, sad stories, and the still sweeter and sadder invocation to the month, which followed it. His mind had lost its edge and movement under the charm, and lay like an axe thrown down upon the floor of the forest, no longer swinging and trenchant, but half lost in flowers, and reflecting only the green summer world above it. Into this silence came no sound but the unceasing murmur of the wood-pigeons, until a sharper note was struck by the clank of the little iron gate which led from the courtyard into the garden path behind him. He did not stir, but listened idly to the slow tread of feet upon the gravel, dying away behind the long sweep of the intervening lawn. Voices, too, there seemed to be, and he thought he could still hear them murmuring

after the steps had gone; but whenever he held his breath to listen, the sound had vanished. He had ceased to wonder, when the green arch of the avenue was suddenly flecked at the far end by two figures returning slowly towards him. The murmur of voices mingled again with his dream; he feared to break it if he moved, and it seemed as if a lifetime passed before the sound changed suddenly from unreality to human speech, and Aubrey and Eleanor stood by him.

"Don't move," cried Eleanor, with a smile of sympathetic indolence; "we are lazy too."

"I am not lazy," said Aubrey, as they sat down in the basket-chairs opposite to him; "I have been to school. Eleanor has done nothing yet; she shall read to us."

She held out her hand for the book, which Stephen gave her.

"Yes," she said, turning over the pages as one who knew them well, "that will do; read us 'Ogier the Dane.'"

"Shall I read the Argument?" said Eleanor; and forthwith began in her low, clear voice—

"'When Ogier was born, six fay ladies came to the cradle where he lay, and gave him various gifts, as to be brave and happy, and the like; but the sixth gave him to be her love when he should have lived long in the world. So Ogier grew up, and became the

greatest of knights, and at last, after many years, he fell into the hands of that fay, and with her, as the story tells, he lives now, though he returned once to the world, as is shown in the process of this tale.'"

"Yes," said Aubrey, with an air of great enjoyment, "he returned once to the world. Begin there; we shall not have time for the whole story. The others will be coming home from church."

"Very well," said Eleanor, beginning to turn over the pages in search of the required place; "but does Mr. Bulmer know the beginning?"

Stephen replied that he knew no more than what the Argument had just told him.

"Then I must explain," she said, "that Ogier the Dane was one of the paladins of Charlemagne, and a tremendous fighter and lover. In his long life he saved France from the infidels, and conquered Babylon; he was King of Denmark, and afterwards of England. When he was old Morgan le Fay carried him away to Avalon, and set a ring on his hand which gave him back perpetual youth. In Avalon they have no sense of time. When Ogier had been there a few days the fay comes to him and tells him that on earth it is already a hundred years since he passed away, and his fame is dim and scarcely remembered. France is once more in danger from the heathen, and there is no one like him to help, 'for men are dwindled both in heart

and frame.' So he goes back, and finds himself unknown, and all his generation long forgotten; but he delivers the country, and is to marry the Queen and be King of France. On his wedding morning Morgan le Fay comes at sunrise and reminds him of Avalon—— But you will hear the end when we come to it. I will begin here—

> "'Think that a hundred years have now passed by
> Since ye beheld Ogier lie down to die
> Beside the fountain; think that now ye are
> In France, made dangerous with wasting war.'"

The soft, clear voice began in the tones of every day, but as it gradually became one with the unceasing flow of the narrative, it took on a monotonous and half-melancholy rhythm. Stephen's eyes were fixed on Aubrey, who seemed to be too absorbed to notice him; but he had no sense of separation from her, for they seemed to be floating together down the stream of the story, and he felt that her thought was holding his own with a force to which he willingly resigned himself.

The poem is a long one, but it ended at last, and for a few moments they all three sat silent.

"It is a good story," Eleanor began; "it is so delightfully fantastic, and yet so realistically put before you."

"Yes," said Stephen, "the miraculous journeys to

fairy-land and back are the easiest things in the world:

> "'One moment on the twain the low sun shone,
> And then the place was void, and they were gone.'"

"But so they were; so they would be," said Aubrey. "There is nothing either easy or difficult about that; you have the power, or you have not. William Morris has it, as no doubt Morgan le Fay had. She would not have been much of a fay without it."

"No," said Eleanor; "her power was so absolute that she could afford to give Ogier one more glance at the rippling Seine. If he did not regret leaving it, Morris does." She opened the book again.

> "'He turned, and gazed upon the city gray,
> Smit by the gold of that sweet morn of May;
> He heard faint noises as of wakening folk,
> As on their heads his day of glory broke;
> He heard the changing rush of the swift stream
> Against the bridge-piers. All was grown a dream.'"

Aubrey looked mischievously at her. "Morris," she said, "for all his revolutionary idealism, is a child of earth, because he is a poet. Avalon was the better place, he knows; but poor old France, with her wars and her gray cities and ancient rivers with real names, is nearer his heart than any paradise of phantoms."

Stephen could not miss the challenge. "I dare say," he replied, "if we only knew, his old France is no more real than his Avalon. Do you think, if we

went back as Ogier did, that we should find life possible or intelligible, even here in England? The life of past centuries, I mean."

Aubrey's eyes brightened. "Life in England," she said, "has always been possible and intelligible for an Englishman. In the fourteenth century, at any rate, I find myself at home; it is only the more external and accidental things that are different."

"Language?" asked Stephen.

"Some of it," she replied, "I do not understand; but I often hear things said in very modern English that have no meaning for me."

She flushed a little as she spoke, and Stephen could have flung himself at her feet.

"There is one weak point in the story, I think," said Eleanor, after a pause, "and that is that neither Ogier nor Morris seem to regret the poor little Queen of France, whose love is tossed aside as easily as her crown."

"Don't you think," asked Stephen, "that that is always so with Morris; he is satisfied if his heroes are faithful to Love, but for him there is little or no distinction between their lovers."

"He may be satisfied," replied Eleanor, "but we are not. Even his enchantment cannot persuade us that one woman is the same as another."

"Let us suppose," said Aubrey, "that in this case

they really were the same. The Queen of France may have been Morgan le Fay in human form. If Ogier could go back and be reincarnated, why could not she too?"

"Yes," said Stephen, "that is a much better story; on such terms going back would be a very different thing. But one would have to be sure."

Aubrey looked at him as if searching in vain for a reply. Eleanor rose and held out her hands to help her up.

"Let us go to meet the others," she said; "I hear them on the terrace."

XV

Mr. Earnshaw had not forgotten his promise to lend Stephen his notebook on the antiquities of Gardenleigh. That evening, when the long hot day was falling to coolness and quiet, when the noisy happiness of the children's hour was over, and the company had dispersed for the restful interval before supper, he seated his guest in an armchair in his own study, placed a square, morocco-bound volume in his hands, and left him to read as much or as little as he felt inclined. It was, in fact, little rather than much. The book was admirably kept, and Stephen was astonished and interested to see how many traces those forgotten centuries had left. But his imagination was not to be impressed by mere lists of names and dates. It was no doubt remarkable that small and remote villages like Croonington and Gardenleigh should have so continuous and well-authenticated a history; there were but few gaps in the list of rectors, and none in that of the knightly tenants who held Gardenleigh of the King *in capite*. Monumental inscriptions and Latin documents set out in full gave an air of dignity, and a page or two of heraldic blazons added a half-mysterious charm. Stephen was willing

enough—far more willing than he could have been a week ago—to consider these relics with an approving eye; but the unadorned and unimpassioned manner in which they were set forth gave him little chance against his own long-ingrained habit of regarding the past as a museum full of meaningless curiosities. After all, he began to think, as he had often thought before, in these eight hundred years some one must always have been living here: one name is no more true than another when all are empty husks, and if an entirely new list were substituted for these to-morrow, no one would perceive any difference.

So ran the argument, but he was less satisfied with it than usual. There were, he knew, two people to whom the difference would be a real one, instantly detected; and they were the two in all the world with whom he most desired to find himself in sympathy. He had a moment of acute discomfort as the thought struck him that a day might be not far off when the substitution of another name for his own on the Gardenleigh dinner-table would be of infinitely less interest to its owners than the changing of a Henry to a Hugh on the Marland pedigree. To fail would be bitter enough, but to fail because these dry bones could not live for him was to be trampled by Fate in her severest, most ironic mood. He rose suddenly and went to the open window; standing there with his fingers still between the pages

of the book, he looked through the hanging clusters of the wistaria at the terrace and the hillside drenched in the setting sunlight, and longed intensely for Aubrey's presence to assure him that all was not yet lost.

"Is that my father's book?" said her voice at the door.

The playful humour of the tone was like the blue returning to a thundery sky. He looked down at the volume in his hand, and laughed at it with her.

"'Earnshaw's Select Charters' is the name it goes by," she continued, "but no one ever reads it. They prefer mine."

She laid a smaller volume on the table, an octavo in white vellum binding, decorated on the sides with gold heraldic tooling, and on the back with the words "Gardenleigh, Vol. II."

Stephen put out a hand towards it. "May I see it?" he asked; "it does look more inviting."

"It is a more popular style of work," she said; "it supplies a long-felt want. Not long-felt in your case, of course," she added, with assumed gravity; "but if my father is going to examine you, it might save you from being completely ploughed."

Stephen laughed; but the light words brought a cloud that almost hid the blue again. He was in a real difficulty, and he felt that it was Aubrey rather than her book that must help him.

"I am afraid," he said seriously, with his eyes on hers, "that you think me very uninterested, very dull and unsympathetic."

She gaily brushed his anxiety aside. "Oh no," she said, "it is much too soon to think anything so bad as that; you have not even read my book yet."

"I am sure to like what you have written," he said; "but that is not really the question, is it? You would not take that as conclusive?"

"No," she replied, without wavering from her light, unconscious tone. "I can imagine even a foreigner liking what I have written; if we are to make an Englishman of you, it must go deeper than that."

"Must every Englishman be made on one pattern? You have more kinds than one in this country?"

"Of animals, not of men," she replied, with charming scorn; "beasts of the field may be turned out anywhere —Devon or Dakota, it is all one to them if the pasture is equally rich. Even they, I think, know the difference, but they are dumb. When I speak of Englishmen, I do not mean them."

He did not want to fall into an argument, but he did want to assert his own good-will, to plead against the touch of scorn in her voice.

"I wish——" he began, almost timidly.

"I know you do," she said, laughing frankly again; "you wish you could see where we differ, and you can't·

That is because you follow only your own line of thought, and not mine; you must understand both if you want to see how far apart they are."

"You have only to show me," he said; "the will is not wanting."

"I will show you," she replied; "in one way or another, I will. But you must read my book first, and get to know my friends, then we will compare notes again."

She nodded as if to encourage him in his task, pushed the book across the table, and was gone. Stephen was divided between trembling delight at her tacit recognition of his suit—surely it had come to that—and anger at himself for making so poor a figure in what might have been a great opportunity. He had gained nothing—except the book; and for some time he read the first page over and over without knowing anything beyond the fact that it was in her handwriting.

XVI

GRADUALLY the storm that shook his pulses abated, his mental vision cleared, and he began to follow the meaning of the words before him. But this reading was unlike any he had known; he was never for a moment alone, never forgetful of the voice whose tones and rhythm were faithfully echoed to his heart from every page his eyes rested upon.

"If this volume is successful," the first chapter began, "it will be the reader's favourite, as it is mine. It is the book of the Marlands, the story of the fourteenth century—the century of Wyclif, Chaucer, and the Black Prince. Gardenleigh was a small holding then, but it was not a backwater, and the Marlands were not outsiders: they did not make history themselves, but they had friends who did, and they took a hand now and then where they could be useful in a small way. To begin with, they were Devon men; and, secondly, they were business men. They left Marland St. Peter when they began to prosper; young Robert de Marland inherited half Gardenleigh through his Colthurst mother, and got a good appointment in Somerset. His son, Sir Henry, went into the army, and did well; he bought the

other half of the knight's fee from his cousin, and the family was successfully founded when Edward the First was king."

The rest of the chapter was concerned with details of the life of Robert and Henry, told in the lively and unconventional manner in which, as Stephen had before noticed, Aubrey habitually spoke of these ancient inhabitants. Nothing could be more modern than Robert's bargaining with his brother Eudo for the rent of the house which he eventually let to him on an outlying part of the property; nothing more natural than their subsequent quarrel and lawsuit, when Robert, irritated by Eudo's calm fashion of treating the whole place as his own, denied him even his rights as a tenant of the manor, and tried to prevent him from taking "reasonable estovers" in his wood of Gardenleigh. Of course, before the case came to trial the women of the family intervened, and Robert was mollified; but it was only at the last moment, and there were costs to be paid, which the brothers agreed, as they lunched together at the Bull in Selwood, amounted to nothing less than extortion on the part of these rascally lawyers.

As for the purchase by Sir Henry from the last of the Colthursts, Aubrey's account of it, though brief enough, was singularly minute and realistic. It might, Stephen thought, have served for the outline of a novel

by Balzac, one of those sordid and pathetic pieces in which hard cash and still harder feelings grind and jingle against one another from end to end of an incredibly interesting story. Last came the building of Gardenleigh Church, the birth of the grandchildren, and the death of Sir Henry, the old soldier who had fought in so many of Edward's campaigns, and lived to see the service going to the dogs under his successor.

Chapter II. was longer and still more vividly written. The reader was invited, or rather compelled, to pay a series of visits to Gardenleigh between the years 1320 and 1350. You saw the young squire—the second Sir Henry—modernizing the house, and selling here and buying there to round off the property to which he had just succeeded. You saw the childhood of his four little sons—Edmund, William, John, and Henry—of whom no one could have guessed that the youngest would be the one to take his father's place thirty years later. You saw their friendships with the Bryans—Guy de Bryan was only a year younger than little Harry—and the Tremurs, whose second son, Ralph, spent many holidays with Edmund, and in the end bore him away to Oxford, much against his father's wish. Guy was the favourite, and the three younger Marland boys would all have gone soldiering with him, if a bathing accident had not laid Will and Johnny

side by side in the north chantry of Gardenleigh Church. Harry and Guy were only the more inseparable, and it must have been with a heavy heart that Sir Henry saw them off to France, and came home alone to wait for the news of Cressy. For Harry was already his heir. Edmund, the eldest and dearest of his four sons, had from his early years shown a disconcerting taste for scholarship; then came his intimacy with Ralph Tremur, a youth of vehement and masterful character, against whose driving power the parental influence carried on a very unequal struggle. It ended in the departure of the two friends for Oxford, and their entry into holy orders in due course. In 1331 young Tremur was instituted to the family living in Cornwall, and two years later Sir Henry persuaded Edmund to come back as rector to Gardenleigh. But to a man of Edmund's deeply earnest character a sinecure and the easy life of a rich house were but a prison. He resigned the living after a year's trial, gave away to his brothers the property his father had settled on him, and devoted himself to work among the seafaring population of Plymouth, where a cure was found for him by John de Grandison, the brilliant and energetic Bishop of Exeter. But his health was often unequal to his determination, and after his mother had nursed him through a series of illnesses, the last of which kept him nearly a whole year at Gardenleigh, she prevailed upon him to give up

Plymouth and accept the position of chaplain to Lord Berkeley in Gloucestershire. By so doing she unwittingly brought him within reach of a new danger. The Black Death, which for a year past had been decimating the clergy of the neighbouring district, fell for the second time upon Portishead, and carried off the incumbent with many of his flock. There was great difficulty in supplying a properly qualified successor, and Edmund, when he heard of it, at once volunteered for the place. He escaped the epidemic, after all; but the anxiety bore hardly upon his parents, to whom, too, the death of their old friend, Sir Guy, young Bryan's father, came as the last and heaviest of a long succession of cruel losses. At sixty-five Sir Henry was now an old man, silent and broken; but his troubles brought him nearer than ever to Edmund, who was constantly riding over to Gardenleigh between the Sundays. The sympathy between them was deep, and needed few words. Their happiest times were passed in the high-walled garden on the hill opposite the house, or in the little church, where so many of their old associations were centred, and where in the sacrament of the altar they renewed together their friendship with the dead and their hope for the generations to come.

Stephen read no more; he moved abruptly, as if with sudden pain, and laid the book aside. The story

was a simple one, but for some reason, which he did not understand, it had pierced to the quick. A hot tide of blood rushed through him, as if a great thought had struck him unexpectedly, and the sunset light in which he sat seemed to be part of an illumination that was taking place within him not less than without. He looked with new eyes across the valley to the upper lake, by whose bank the home of these men had once stood, in whose waters the church of their consolation was still mirrored among its trees. For him, too, it had, since yesterday, associations that could never be forgotten; it had gathered him into the fellowship of all these centuries, and given the touch of life to that which an hour ago had been to him the dust of graves. To question Aubrey's authority, to ask upon what evidences she had built, never once occurred to him; the facts of the story were the facts of human feeling, the most irrefutable of all; the characters moved and breathed with the very fire of youth, the very sadness and resignation of old age. They loved this place, he no longer doubted, as Aubrey loved it, as he himself was inevitably beginning to love it; it was the background of his dearest thoughts and theirs; they must be his friends as they were Aubrey's. He desired not so much to meet with Edmund as to meet him again, and he looked down to the far end of the church path as if in expectation that he might at any moment see

him stepping out from the shadow of the trees; for he was forgetting, as he had never forgotten before, that what to the eye is only a sunlit space of half a mile may measure by the beat of human pulses more than half a thousand years.

XVII

THE evening was a warm one, and after supper the moonlit terrace seemed a better place than drawing-room or library. At first every one gathered in one cheerful group; but as the still magic of the night made itself felt, the conversation became quieter and quieter, and the company melted away in congenial twos and threes. Aubrey was soon sitting in her old place upon the lower parapet; and Stephen, as he stood silent by her side, wondered what thoughts could be stirring beneath the calm that seemed to have turned the clear outline of her face to purest marble.

"Look!" she said at last in a low voice, pointing to two figures some distance away.

The moonlight gave them a weird distinctness, but took from them at the same time all individuality; it was impossible even to guess at their identity as they moved slowly across the grass and disappeared without a sound among the sombre yews and ilexes of the garden slope.

"Who are they?" asked Stephen, in the same low tone.

"Who can tell on such a night as this?" she replied. "You know how in June evenings, or in deep frost, or when the September moon is rising behind great trees, things lose their century as they lose their colour."

"I know now," he said.

She looked at him, and he saw that she understood. "Was I right?" she asked.

"You made one promise," he replied, "that you can never fulfil: you said that you would show me how we differed."

"Where have you been?" she asked, smiling faintly. "Did you make friends?"

"That will come," he said; "meanwhile I have met with a magic stronger than my own."

"You will not burn your books?"

"My books?" he said quickly. "There is nothing in them—not one creature with the breath of life. You can do what I have never done."

"You have done more than I," she said. "Your people are phantoms, but you created them; mine are real, but I have only drawn them as I saw them."

"No," he said; "you succeed where I have failed. There must be life in the Future, but I have not found it."

"It is not the explorer's fault," she said, with a gentle earnestness that made his pulse leap; "but in

the land of bare possibilities there can be no one to love. Love is the child of memory; it is the old countries that are warm and full of friends."

He was silent; the mere name of love from her lips was more than he could bear; his heart roared in his ears like a storm in mid-ocean.

"If your friends are to be mine," he said at last, "no one but you can take me there."

It was a sudden and dangerous moment; one tremor of the hand upon the wheel, and mid-ocean would have broken full upon her. But she heard the change in his voice, and was not to be taken by surprise.

"I have thought of that," she said quietly; "but to be hasty would spoil everything. It is further than you think to the old house across the valley there, and it would be better to know the risks before you start. You talk of a magic stronger than your own; but you have not yet seen how strong it may be, and you are mistaken in thinking it is mine to control. You take it for a kind of literary gift in me—a power to convince by words, to make less real, less living people appear almost as real and living as those we live among. But that is the opposite of the truth. To revisit the past in my way is to strip off illusions, not to put them on. Time is the greatest of all illusions; it persuades us that our most fantastic dream is true—

the dream that things and people come into being and pass out of being again—though we know, if we once think of it, that eternity is a single instant, and that there are but two kinds of things or people—those that are, and those that are not. Those of us who are at all are every one contemporaries; but we live, as it were, like figures in a tapestry—invisible to each other, and fondly imagining we are made of different thread to our neighbours, whom we have never seen. There is no reason why we should not see them; they are here as much as we are; we have only to take the cap of darkness from our heads and find them as human as ourselves. In childhood we are wise; we know no difference between the centuries; but it is the first business of our teachers to lay stress upon the trivial contrasts of speech and dress which they think will make the wooden peepshow of their history attractive; the rest—the life we share—they know nothing about. I remember asking my first governess if she had ever seen the Black Prince, and whether he was like any one I knew. She scolded me for a silly child; but I have lived to know him intimately, and to see his comrades giving their own breakfast to a conquered Boer army. They did not know that they were five centuries out of date."

Stephen was silent. The great moment had come and gone without result; she had succeeded in keeping

her course, and the wave had rolled on and spent itself. Before another could gather she was speaking again.

"I am sure you have not forgotten your childhood," she said; "you must know that sudden falling from you, that vanishing of the sense of time. I remember when it first happened to me I was in a field full of cowslips and ladysmocks, near a little brook where there were minnows. My sisters had run on and left me, and when I stood up from dabbling in the water I found myself in a world without hours or minutes. I wandered about all day by myself, and was brought home at dusk by a search party. Afterwards I found that I could always bring this feeling back by sitting down alone and saying my own name over and over many times; then I discovered that by repeating in the same way the name of any of my favourite heroes in history I could get nearer to them than by all the pictures in the books. Their outward selves vanished like my own, and we lived together as one lives with intimate friends, by sympathy rather than by the eyes."

"Yes," said Stephen, "I do remember something of that feeling, though I had long forgotten it. But the magic of a name——"

She rose to go indoors. "Be careful," she said as they crossed the terrace; "do nothing rashly; an explorer should always think of his return." She laughed

with the half-caressing, half-mocking laugh that was always Stephen's dearest memory of her. "I have often thought," she said, "that perhaps some day I may lose my cap of darkness once for all, and have to stay the other side the valley altogether."

"Then I shall lead the search party," he said.

"Thank you," she replied as they reached the verandah. "I should like that, if it is not too much out of your way."

XVIII

When Stephen found himself alone in his own room, he knew that sleep was far from him. His mind had never been so clear and active, his recollection so vivid, his every nerve so perfectly in tune. The entire field of his consciousness seemed to lie before him like a smooth, unbroken sheet of ice, upon which glided a hundred images in a crowd that was never a confusion, endlessly crossing one another's track in swift and unforeseen figures, but never wavering from the symmetry of their curves, and always returning to the centre at the moment when they neared the outer darkness. Beyond doubt they were his own thoughts, but they were in some strange way external to him, and he followed their course with a kind of amazement, for their movement seemed to be concerted, and concerted by some agreement in which his own will had no part. Why, he wondered, should every event, great or small, of the past two days be present to his mental vision at the same instant? Why should every thought, new or old, combine to weave this recurrent tangle from which he could not even attempt to break away?

The problem was to discover the nature of the

change which had taken place in him. His love for Aubrey had ripened swiftly into passion. Was that the secret of this starry dance? Was he merely bewitched by her music, her delicate mockery, her devotion to the soil of her birthplace, her deep religious sense, her historic imagination? It might well have been, but he saw with clear and instant conviction that it was not so. That sudden new experience, which had come upon him twice during his first walk to Gardenleigh, that certainty that he was remembering places which to his knowledge he had never seen before, seemed to have no traceable connection with Aubrey or the spells she had cast round him. Was it in the place itself, this dreamy, untouched corner of the West, that the charm lay? There was beauty enough here, by day or night, but that which had enchanted him was the beauty which lay behind the visible scene, the glimpses of the timeless country into which not the magic of the earth, but the voice of a child, had enabled him to pass for a moment. Aubrey and the child—they both knew the secret; but it was not their own; it was no human imagination, but a birthright of the soul. Why had he waited until now to claim it, and by what design was he at this moment so hemmed in and whirled along in darkness?

Upon the table before him lay Aubrey's book, and he set himself to read it in the hope of stilling the whirl of his thoughts. But though his mind, under the

guidance of hers, quickly freed itself from the eddy in which it had been revolving, it found a fresh perplexity in the very vividness and fascination of the narrative. As he read the story of those lives, so ardent, so complete, so tenderly coloured, they became more living and more present to his imagination than the circle into which he had followed the Aubrey of everyday life. The faces and voices among which he had spent these two days seemed to become faint and recede into a distance which took from them all their vitality: Aubrey alone still breathed, and kept her human speech and laughter. The more he thought of her the less she appeared to have in common with these toneless and attenuated figures, or with the brief and trivial concerns in which they were involved. She seemed to belong to the world which she had called up for him, and he felt that if he was ever to find and hold her real self it must be there.

The night was now far advanced, and he was more and more restless. He longed to be back in the moonlight that still lay faintly cool upon the terrace below his window. The darkened house, as he went down, seemed to lie in a mortal sleep, and when he reached the garden and looked back at it, he saw it as a huge and stately tomb, and thought of all within it as belonging to an irrevocable past.

The moon was far down towards her setting. As

she dipped below the trees, Stephen, to whom nothing could now have appeared strange or incredible, saw a cloaked figure come out upon the upper terrace and move quickly towards the green slope of the garden. It was the figure of a woman, and surely there was but one woman who could still be moving with the grace of life by this great sepulchre of a buried generation. She came towards him down the steps, passed without a sign by the dark yew tree under which he stood waiting, and turned to the left below him into the shadowy alley which led, he knew, to the gate of the church path. He listened for the clang of the iron latch, but no sound came, and after a while he followed to the gate. When he reached it, he found it standing wide open; outside the sky was fading into dawn, and there was no one in sight. He strode quickly up the rising path, and as he reached the highest point he saw among the trees below the flutter of a white dress passing quickly between the upper lakes and into the green obscurity beyond. Again, when he followed, there was nothing to be seen of it; but as the sky above the far end of the lake was flushing with the blue and crimson that comes before the sun, he stood in the growing light upon the further bank and looked up at the yellow mullions and gray weathered chimneys of the old house.

XIX

THE hour of dawn is to most men unfamiliar; but Stephen in his wanderings had seen the sun rise on many lands, and knew well the keen shivering delight of all the senses that comes at the moment when the new day floods the world with new life and power and gratitude. When this feeling had passed into the quiet, half-drowsy mood of utter contentment that so often follows it, he climbed the hill above the house, and sat long among the faint and changing shadows of the trees that hung upon the edge of the down, waiting for some sign to give him a forward impulse and a clue to the unknown path. Dream after dream floated past him as the sunlight poured more and more warmly into his veins, and many dreamlike recollections of his past life mingled in the ceaseless drift. He knew the real from the imaginary, but there seemed to be no longer any difference in their importance; all the pictures in the book were equally shadowy, equally fit for the idle contemplation of the soul in its place apart. He saw, too, without any amazement, that here and there in the landscape before him there were unfamiliar aspects, slight changes such as those to be felt rather than seen

after a period of absence; and from the opposite hill the house from which he had come last night had disappeared without a trace, though the avenues and the old walled garden still remained. This was the world he knew, but not the world as he had known it; its form and beauty were the same, but not its relation to himself. Perhaps it was not upon the place, but upon him that change had come; was it, he wondered, that change which comes to all men in their turn, the end of so much they have known, the beginning of that which they have never known? It seemed possible enough; but the common name for such a change he tried in vain to remember, or, if he remembered, he rejected it as having no longer the meaning he required to match his new experience.

His reverie was broken by vague sounds of movement in the house below, and he saw that between the clear expanse of the lake and the height from which he looked the air was dimmed by a column of faint blue smoke. It told him that here, too, were men, for here there was a hearth and daily fire upon it; here, then, it might be Aubrey herself that he would find, and no elusive phantom. At the same moment the beat of hoofs came rapidly over the turf behind him, and he saw two horses approaching by the avenue across the down. One was riderless, but laden with packs on either side; the other carried a groom, who seemed to be

upon this road for the first time, for he halted and looked about him when he came to the steep pitch where the path turned down the face of the hill. But he passed on in a moment, and Stephen saw him disappear through the stable gateway on the far side of the road, and heard the clatter of the horses as they were pulled up in the stony courtyard. At the same instant a feeling of satisfaction came over him, as if at the accomplishment of a journey: he knew that at last he had arrived at Gardenleigh, and that nothing remained for him but to descend and enter.

XX

THE square-headed doorway of the porch stood open, and from it as he approached came the figure of a priest with both hands outstretched in welcome.

"Stephen!" said a quiet cordial voice that was not the voice of a stranger; "here you are at last, after all these years."

Stephen gripped the hands that met his own, and looked straight and hard into the eyes that faced him.

"Edmund!" he said; and then, with sudden wonder, "but how did you know me?"

"We were expecting you," replied the other, "and they told me that your man had come already. Besides, you are far less changed than I must be."

Stephen looked again at the clear-cut, intellectual face; it certainly bore the stamp of more than its forty-five years. The brown eyes and broad forehead were still beautiful and serene, but pain and hard work had drawn lines downward on each side of the mouth, and set the lips together as the lips of youth are never set. He realized with a quick stirring of sympathy that what he had read of this man was something more than a vivid tale.

"Yes," he said, "you have been through a hard time; I have heard it all, but some day I must hear it all again from you."

"I can never tell it all," said Edmund, "and I am not sure that the worst is not yet to come. You must expect," he added, quickening his speech as if to change the subject, "to find my father quite an old man now; but my mother is wonderful. She is as bright as ever, and she is particularly happy at present because she has Aubrey with her."

Stephen felt his heart fail and leap forward again; the power of speech deserted him. Awake or dreaming, in one world or another, his whole consciousness was gathered up into one thought, concentrated for one effort. He followed Edmund in silence through the hall, where servants were moving about, into an empty room beyond, and out upon a stone-flagged ambulatory on the eastern side of the house. There in the clear morning sunlight lay a table spread for breakfast; but there were only two persons seated at it, and neither of them was Aubrey.

The first to greet Stephen was Lady Marland. She was singularly bright-eyed, and her voice had a high, singing resonance like that of a bird. The delicate proportions of her small figure and the quickness of her movements added to the resemblance. She looked, as Edmund had said, wonderfully young and active by

contrast with her husband, who wore a black-velvet skull-cap over his silver hair, and rose from his seat slowly and with some difficulty. His face was thin and worn, but it was not melancholy; the white eyebrows were habitually arched with an expression of almost humorous resignation, as of one who, after heavy losses, could still protest that life was giving him more than a useless old fellow had any right to claim. But he was evidently weak, and there was a weariness in his voice that pierced even through the genial and charming courtesy with which he welcomed his guest.

They all sat down, and breakfast began. Stephen was placed with his back to the wall, that he might enjoy the view of the lake; but his senses were alert to catch every sound in the house behind him, and he returned but absent-minded replies to the first conventional remarks of his hostess.

"You have not quite forgotten Gardenleigh, I hope?" she began. "It must be twenty years since you were here. You have been a great traveller; we have heard something of your wanderings."

"My dear," said Sir Henry very gently to his wife, "we must not ask Stephen too many questions; by-and-by he will tell us whatever he wishes us to know about himself. What you do tell us," he added, turning gravely to Stephen, "will be told to old friends who always thought your father right wherever he was."

Lady Marland patted her husband's hand reassuringly.

"I was going to ask about Italy," she said, "not about any private affairs. Aubrey has been in Italy too."

Stephen started perceptibly.

"You remember your old playfellow Aubrey?" she continued.

"Not very likely, my dear mother," said Edmund; "she must have been a mere child."

"Where is Aubrey?" asked Sir Henry. "Why doesn't she come to breakfast?"

"She has been out early," said Lady Marland; "and when I came down she had fallen asleep again; I did not like to wake her."

She half rose, as if to go in search, but sat back with an exclamation.

Stephen turned quickly, and saw Aubrey standing beside him, with the warm flush of life on her cheeks and the old gleam of bright mischief in her eyes. She held out her hand to him with perfect naturalness, but he looked in vain for any sign to show him how far she shared with him in this new life the recollection of the old.

"I am not late," she said; "I am earlier than any of you. I have been up to the garden to see the sun rise."

"Aubrey is always straying," said Lady Marland to Stephen, "and she will go alone."

"It is a dangerous habit," said Stephen, in the same light tone; but turning to Aubrey and looking intently at her: "You might stray too far some day, and never come back."

Her eyes told him nothing. "In the garden?" she replied. "How can one stray too far in a garden? And why should I not come back? Unless some one would build me a house up there," she added. "If I lived at Gardenleigh, it would certainly be on the hill, and not down here."

Was this unconscious or wilfully perverse, or was she intentionally delaying the explanation until they were alone? It might well be so; but as the talk went on, and he heard her call him by his name, as an old friend of her childhood, while her every look and her very frankness denied him any other acquaintance, a fierce impatience seized him to compel the truth from her. When breakfast ended, and he found himself alone with her for a moment—

"Tell me," he said, "after all this change——"

"Yes," she replied gaily, "after all this change?"

"Is it possible that you remember me as well as I remember you?"

"Quite possible," she replied laughing, "if you remember very little of me."

"But I remember—it would take long to tell you how much."

"Then we are certainly not on equal terms," she said; "but, at any rate, I think I may say I am glad to meet you again."

"Do you mean," he asked, "that we are to begin afresh from so small a foundation as that?"

"Oh!" she replied; "but what does the beginning matter, so long as it is a beginning?"

Nothing could be kinder than her manner, nothing more unconscious; and yet, as she turned to leave him, he seemed once more to catch a passing glimmer of the faint mockery he had so long known and adored.

XXI

As the sun climbed higher and higher, and the day began to pass from the freshness of morning towards the long hours of noon, Stephen lost all sense of newness in his surroundings; the change that he remembered seemed to concern his present life and thoughts as little as a tale of childhood, or the recollection of some holiday once spent in foreign travel. There was nothing strange in the delight with which he breathed the warm, scented June air, and felt the beat of the dusty buttercups about his insteps as he walked through the park with Edmund by the side of Sir Henry's old pony. It seemed to be the object of his companions to spare him the embarrassment of questions, while giving him freely every kind of information about their own concerns. The reason of this he did not understand, but it was evidently connected in their minds with old troubles outside his own present knowledge, and the delicacy of their attitude freed him from difficulties which he had not had time even to apprehend. His own affairs being thus put aside by tacit consent, he found himself drawn immediately into those of the Marlands, and carried away upon a stream both deep

and turbulent. The world had been to him, until he met with Aubrey, a spectacle rather than a contest, and to this moment he had personally known but one strong emotion, one possible cause of battle; for though he had written ardently and sincerely of the future and its hopes, he had yet to feel the clenched anger and desperate resolution with which a man of his breed turns to face iron facts and a living enemy.

The nature of the trouble that was evidently weighing upon his new friends he did not perceive all at once. On the following day, they told him, he would have the privilege of making the acquaintance of one of the most notable men in England. Their old friend and patron, the Bishop of Exeter, had written to announce that he would honour Gardenleigh with a visit on his way from Bath into Devonshire. Sir Henry spoke with profound admiration and respect of his coming guest, and explained to Stephen at some length the grounds, public and private, upon which these feelings were based.

John Grandison, Bishop of Exeter since 1327, was, it appeared, by birth and education, and still more by character and achievements, a prelate of the highest distinction. It was, to begin with, no small thing to be the son of William Lord Grandison. This aristocratic soldier of fortune, a captain, knight banneret and baron of Edward the First, was a younger son, and eventually

the chief, of the famous Burgundian house whose principal stronghold has overlooked the Lake of Neuchâtel from a time beyond memory. He claimed kinship with the Emperor; his grandmother was a cousin of Eleanor of Provence, his mother a daughter of De Vaud, and his wife—John's mother—a great-niece of Bishop Cantilupe, canonized as St. Thomas of Hereford. She was, moreover, heiress to one-half of the vast estates of her father, Lord Tregoze.

John, the second son of this last alliance, was bred to the Church under auspices that befitted his descent. He read theology at the University of Paris under Jacques Fournier, who was afterwards to exchange the professorial for the Papal chair. At an early age young Grandison became Archdeacon of Nottingham, and soon afterwards Prebend of Lincoln and Chaplain to His Holiness at Avignon. Finally, after confidential employment as Papal Ambassador and other marks of the highest favour, he was sent to Exeter at the age of thirty-five. There he found himself in a position of unexampled difficulty, faced by turbulent nobles, insolent monks, and a rough and independent populace, with a cathedral in danger of becoming ruinous, and a diocese upon the verge of bankruptcy. But he was more than equal to the task. From the first he had held his own against all opposition and triumphed over every kind of obstacle: when in 1353

—the twenty-sixth year of his episcopate—he completed and reopened the nave of his great church, he had for years ruled the two wild western counties with a hand of iron.

All this, and a good deal more, Sir Henry now recounted to Stephen with evident appreciation, but in a tone of depression which made it sound almost like an estimate of the overwhelming power of a dreaded adversary. For the explanation of this attitude Stephen had not long to wait. There were many orders to be given in preparation for to-morrow; Sir Henry was bound for the gamekeeper's lodge, and Edmund and Stephen, leaving him there, were to walk on through the wood to an outlying farm. For the first few minutes after parting company they spoke of indifferent subjects, and then fell into a silence, from which Edmund at last roused himself with an effort.

"You must be wondering," he said, "why we should look forward with such heavy hearts to the coming of an old and valued friend, especially when he is at the same time one whose presence is an honour in itself. But it is the very depth of our obligation to him which increases our apprehension. My father has enjoyed his friendship for five and twenty years. I owe to him my appointment at Plymouth, and many other kindnesses; and now for the first time we find ourselves in danger of his serious and lasting displeasure."

Stephen looked up in surprise, and his astonishment deepened as he saw the stern expression of his companion's face, in which there appeared to his eye every sign of resolve and not one of submission. Edmund caught his glance and seemed to understand it.

"We admit our obligations to the full," he said. "The Bishop has every right, human and divine, to call upon our loyalty. Unhappily in this matter there are also upon the other side claims which we cannot deny. To be quite frank, we do not wish to deny them, and I see at this moment no way out of the strait place we are in; it seems as if every grain of us must be ground between the upper and the nether millstone."

"What is the nether millstone?" asked Stephen. "What are these other claims?"

"I will tell you," said Edmund, "but for my own sake rather than yours. The story is a long one and full of perplexity; if it were not that I hope for some comfort from you, and possibly for some help in the strain of the next few days, I should be loth to burden you with it."

Stephen protested his readiness to be of service in any possible way, and after another interval of silence Edmund began again.

"I forget whether you ever knew my friend Ralph

Tremur, but you must, at any rate, have heard of him?"

"I have heard," said Stephen, "that he was ordained, and proceeded to a family living in Cornwall."

"True," said Edmund; "but that is long ago: the wind has blown many ways since then. Ralph was not born for the Church—at least, not to be happy in it. It sounds strange, perhaps, for me to say that, for it was through him that I came to take Orders myself; but I knew him at Oxford better than any one, and I had many misgivings about his career even then. It was impossible to suppose that a man of his extraordinary abilities and vehement character could ever be content for long with the life of an obscure country parson. He took the living to please his parents, but he obtained leave of non-residence at the same time, and stayed up at Oxford for another year. At the end of that time he got the Bishop to extend his leave, and again at the end of the year found it impossible to tear himself away. He applied once more for an extension, and I must say that he was treated with more forbearance than he had any right to expect. The Bishop was never lax in discipline; he resided continuously himself, and he expected others to do the same. But he sympathized in this case with a brilliant and devoted scholar, and perhaps he thought he might make a great servant of the Church out of him. He

gave Ralph leave of absence for a third year, but warned him that it was the last time he would listen to such a request. By the beginning of the following October he must be in residence at Warleggan. This was in 1333; the year passed in futile attempts at persuasion, and a month before the date named Ralph had resigned his living. It is hard to blame him; he had no rival of his own age at the University, either in scholarship or philosophy, and he is gifted in other ways as well. He speaks with equal fluency in Latin, French, English, and the Cornish dialect of his own county. No preferment seemed to be beyond his reach, and we hoped that his choice might prove to have been justified in principle, though his best friends regretted the abruptness of his methods."

"But surely," said Stephen, as his companion paused for a moment, "the Bishop cannot still be pursuing a fault of more than twenty years ago? Is he so vindictive?"

"Not vindictive, but tenacious," replied Edmund. "He never gives up a point he has once taken. In this case he would have forgiven if Ralph had kept out of his way; but he would never have forgotten, for he never forgets anything, and unhappily it is Ralph himself who has kept his memory awake. He failed to find the wider opening for which he had thrown up his humble duties at Warleggan—I have never asked

why, but his temperament is a sufficient explanation—and as he became more and more dissatisfied with Oxford, he took to haunting the neighbourhood of his old home. He had always been liked down there; the rector who succeeded him was unpopular, and there was a quarrel which came to the Bishop's ears. The matter was not thoroughly looked into, and I think that this time Ralph was unjustly blamed. But he went on to a much graver indiscretion. He was always of an inquiring and argumentative turn; he loved to be in opposition, and would take nothing on trust. He was singularly earnest and fearless, but religion was to him a matter of evidence rather than of insight."

Stephen's interest was now fully awakened. "I think I can guess what is coming," he said. "The character you describe has all the makings of a great heretic."

"Yes," said Edmund, without flinching, "you have said the word; it was in my mind for years before it ever crossed my lips. But here we are at the farm; if you will wait a minute or two for me, while I give my orders, I will tell you the rest on our way home."

Stephen walked slowly round the pretty house, and looked into the farmyard, but his thoughts were elsewhere. There was to him something unexpectedly sympathetic in the character of this Ralph, as it had been drawn by his friend and fellow-student. He

longed to meet him and discuss with him fully the position of the inquiring mind confronted by authority. How little he had grasped the possibilities of that position when both parties are in deadly earnest and only one is free, he was soon to discover.

Edmund quickly returned, and they set out on their homeward walk, taking a path which lay to the right of that by which they had come; it was very little longer, and would give them a glimpse of another valley to the west, which was worth seeing. Stephen brought the conversation back into its former channel by warmly expressing his interest in the heretic, and inquiring what form his heresy had taken.

"I am very glad you are interested," replied Edmund, "because Ralph is a really remarkable man, and yet with any one who is not to some extent biassed in his favour it is impossible for his views to gain even a fair hearing. He is said to have gone to extremes, to have struck at the roots of Christianity. . . ." He hesitated a moment and continued, "Until we can hear from himself what he really means, we cannot accept such statements, but the common report is that he has for some time past denied the doctrine of Transubstantiation. Whatever his opinions may be, I have no doubt that they are sincere, and founded on long and careful study; but unhappily he could not be content, as many holders of unorthodox philosophical

views are, to keep himself uncommitted in public. He is a fanatical lover of truth, and has been for several years now preaching his heresies about the country to the common folk, both in the diocese of Exeter and beyond it."

"And the Bishop will not stand that?" asked Stephen.

"How could he?" replied Edmund. "It seemed harmless enough to speak freely on such subjects among one's undergraduate friends at Oxford. Inquiry and disputation were in the air, and those who took part in the fray were all pretty equally capable of taking care of themselves. But the poor people of the streets or the villages are at the mercy of a clever and eloquent speaker. He risks a little mud-throwing; but they are in danger of losing their eternal peace. The Bishop is responsible for their souls, and he is bound, he would say, to treat a preacher of heresy as a wolf."

"Do you, then, side with him?" asked Stephen, in some surprise.

"On the contrary, I put his case as strongly as I can because I am about to contend against it. Ralph is my oldest and dearest friend. I know his character as the Bishop cannot possibly know it, and now that I am to have the chance of speaking with him in private, I shall do my utmost to persuade him of

Ralph's real goodness. I can say with perfect truth that I have never known a more honest or sane mind, or one more genuinely religious in its own way. No one could seek truth more whole-heartedly—very few Churchmen can compare with him there—but he is not content to seek it only within the limits laid down by the Church."

"He claims, in fact, the right of private judgment?"

"No, no," said Edmund, quickly; "that is not fair. As I understand him, what he claims to set up against accepted doctrines is not his own or any other man's opinion, but a kind of necessary truth—a truth derived, he would say, by strict reasoning from facts within the range of our ordinary senses."

"But the Church does not go so far as to forbid the study of natural science?"

"Not at all," said Edmund; "but it teaches that the knowledge of the material world is of small importance compared with that of the spiritual; so that if they conflict, if earth seem to tell us one thing and Heaven another, it is the voice of Heaven to which we must listen."

"And the voice of Heaven speaks only through the mouth of the Church?" asked Stephen, with compressed lips.

"That," said Edmund, "is what Ralph has dared to call in question. He maintains that when two

doctrines are opposed, reason alone can decide between them; in fact, that the voice of the Church is only to be supreme when it accords with the human understanding."

"Well?" said Stephen, "well?" He was chafing like a hound in the leash. "What do you think yourself?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"In these five years," said Edmund, "I have thought fifty things about it. I have been torn this way and that; but I am less troubled now. Do you see this wall?" he asked abruptly, stopping short in his walk.

The path they were following had led them from the first along the side of a low stone wall, much broken and covered thickly with green moss. Whatever its original purpose had been, it was now evidently no more than a landmark.

"This," said Edmund, planting a foot against the tumbled stones, "is the old boundary between the manors of Gardenleigh and Buckland Barham. It runs, as you have seen, right through the centre of this wood from end to end, but without dividing it, as it once did, for my father is now lord of both manors, and Gardenleigh Wood and Buckland Wood are one continuous covert—continuous, that is, for their lord, but not by any means so for others. The two manors have an entirely different set of customs and tenures,

so that to the tenants on one side and the other this wall stands for a real difference; one half the wood is free to a Buckland man for winter firing, while the other half feeds the pigs of his Gardenleigh neighbour. I have comforted myself by likening the territory of our minds to this old wood. There is a true line of demarcation between theology and science, and what is law on one side of it does not necessarily hold good on the other; but there is one lord of all, and his friends may enjoy the whole domain. But the lord, who is himself only the tenant-in-chief of the King, is bound to act justly by those under him; he cannot force the customs of one manor on those who live and work in the other."

"Good!" said Stephen; "and a very moderate way of putting it too. What answer will your Bishop find to that?"

Edmund's face fell again. "The ploughman gives no answer to the plough: he drives it through; it is he who commands the team. I am in the Bishop's hand; he is not coming to consult me, but to drive me like iron through Ralph's obstinate heart."

"Defy him, then!" cried Stephen, flaming up at last. "What has your friend to fear? If the worst come to the worst, he will only be one Protestant the more."

He had forgotten himself; but Edmund seemed not

to have heard the words: at any rate, he remained for some time silent, and when he spoke again it was of another subject. By this time they were once more back at the keeper's lodge, and from there they struck across to the house by the way by which they had come out.

XXII

STEPHEN'S hope of a quiet afternoon with Aubrey was doomed to a sudden and unforeseen eclipse. Shortly after midday a mounted messenger arrived in great haste, bearing a note of apology from the Bishop, and announcing that he had accelerated his plans, and would reach Gardenleigh the same day. Lady Marland put a good face on the emergency, and spoke warmly before the servants of the great man's kindness in treating his friends with so much confidence and informality. Edmund exclaimed with admiration of the wonderful energy of this hard-worked prelate of sixty-four, who, to save a few hours, would ride through the heat of a June day, and take his chance with a household unprepared to receive him. But Sir Henry was silent and downcast; he could not conceal the apprehension which, in reality, was troubling them all. It was no pleasant business upon which their guest was bound; and in such circumstances he who comes in haste may only too possibly be coming in anger.

It was quickly determined that no formality should be omitted. The Bishop must be met and escorted home. Sir Henry had been out already, and his wife

insisted that he should spare himself. But he could go with Aubrey as far as the gate at the eastern end of the garden avenue, and wait there in the shade while Edmund and Stephen rode to the Bath lodge, or as much further as time allowed. They set out as soon as the horses were ready, and rode at a smart canter; but as they passed the brook which lies in the deep hollow on the Gardenleigh and Croonington boundary they saw the arch of the gateway on the hill beyond suddenly darkened, and knew they were too late. Two riders—the Bishop and his secretary—came down the steep slope at a foot's pace; on a nearer view both were seen to be hot and dusty, and their appearance added to the uncomfortable feeling in Stephen's mind that everything had somehow or other gone wrong, and would probably continue to do so. He was, therefore, agreeably surprised by the manner in which Edmund's greeting was received and his own presentation acknowledged. The Bishop's whole address was full of dignity, but he expressed, in the strongest and simplest terms, his regret at the trouble which he must be causing by his change of plans, and his unworthiness of the honour which his hosts had done him in hastening out to meet him at his entrance to their territory. Stephen looked hard at him as he said the words, but there was not a trace of insincerity to be detected. Every line of this man's

face, every tone of his voice, proclaimed that he was used to command and familiar with great affairs; but he held himself in with a proud humility, which was evidently habitual and almost unconscious, as if acknowledging continually that he was but a servant, though his powers were great and would be put in proof without hesitation. This attitude of continual reference to a higher authority did not in any way diminish the conviction which was immediately borne in upon all who saw him, that here was a great man surrounded by his inferiors. His force, both of mind and body, was unmistakable. His figure, though spare, was firm and strong; his head, which projected slightly forward over a deep chest, was keen and hard in outline, with a pointed chin and straight nose, a broad, low forehead and piercing deep-set eyes—the head of a very quick and resolute fighter, Stephen thought, with the lean and clear lines of the athlete rather than the ascetic.

The Bishop explained that his servants and baggage were upon the road, but probably at some distance behind: he had, in fact, as afterwards appeared, outrun them by nearly six miles in twelve. He rode with perfect mastery a horse of great power and beauty, very different in its paces from the ambling ponies dear to most of the ecclesiastics of his time; and he talked to Edmund without stopping as they

cantered up the long slope from the brook to the avenue.

There at the gate stood Sir Henry. He had dismounted from his pony and was leaning on Aubrey's arm; in front of him were drawn up four servants, mounted and dressed in the white-and-scarlet livery of the Marlands. As the Bishop passed between them and came to the gate, Sir Henry moved forward and put out his hand towards the stirrup; but his guest impetuously refused to allow even the formal execution of this act of homage. He flung himself from the saddle without assistance, reining in his horse so suddenly as to force it backwards into collision with those of both the servants on Sir Henry's left hand, and there leaving it to be secured as well as might be. His manner to his host was considerate and even gracious, but there was a masterful and almost animal vigour about him which made the older man's gentle courtesy seem pathetic and appealing by contrast. Stephen was already deeply impressed with the superior power of this dreaded antagonist; it was impossible, he felt, to imagine him off his guard for a moment.

He had no sooner formed this opinion than he was forced to modify it. Sir Henry was drawing the Bishop's attention to the young companion on whose arm he was still leaning.

"Since you are good enough to think of us at all," he said, "you must remember my niece Aubrey—she was Lady Salisbury's little favourite in old days."

The Bishop's face softened to a tenderness of which Stephen could not have believed it capable. He took Aubrey's hand in both his own.

"My child," he said, in the low tones of intense affection, "it matters little who else remembers, if Katharine does not forget."

He fixed his eyes upon her with a look of such wistful sadness that Stephen turned away.

"Well, Henry," he heard him say, "shall we go forward?" and the next moment he saw him helping his host to mount again.

Stephen and Edmund galloped ahead. "Whom was he speaking of?" asked Stephen, when they were out of hearing.

"Katharine was his sister, Lady Salisbury," replied Edmund; "she died eight or nine years ago. The last few years of her life she was with the Bishop almost continually, and he has never got over her loss. Did you see his face change when he mentioned her name?"

"See it?" cried Stephen; "it was like a mask falling."

"No," said Edmund, "there is no mask; his feelings are all genuine—you can see that from their

vehemence—but his love for his sister is the most genuine and most powerful of all. Happily for us, it is in our favour; but it is the feeling he most seldom shows."

"Still, he has a heart, and it can be touched."

"By Aubrey, perhaps," said Edmund; "for the rest of us it is buried beneath all Rome."

Stephen this time was not so readily convinced; he looked with sympathy upon the Bishop when he entered the courtyard, and thought that in spite of his abundant energy there was a touch of weariness about his face when in repose.

XXIII

Hot though the day had been, the sunset brought with it a chilly breeze, and every one was glad to gather round a wood fire which Lady Marland had ordered to be lit in the gallery. This was a large room on the first floor, running along the whole side of the house and lighted by mullioned windows at the ends only. But to-night the windows were closed, and the sombre panelling was lit up by the blaze of the dry oaken logs piled one above another between the great iron dogs upon the hearth. Above, on the high carved mantel that stretched upwards in the half-light, the seven marlions in the Marland arms showed dimly against the wavy gules and argent of the shield, and along the wall stood several suits of armour with old-fashioned helms, behind whose cross-shaped sights the flickering firelight seemed now and again to rekindle long dead gleams of chivalry. To the left of the chimney on a high-backed chair of red-and-white velvet sat the Bishop; a table by him was bright with silver cups containing wine and spices. Opposite to him sat Aubrey on a low seat down by the hearth;

Stephen was next to her, and the Marlands filled up the circle between.

For some time the talk was merely conventional: some one said that a fire was very pleasant even in summer, to which every one else agreed in slightly varying forms of speech that did nothing to advance the conversation. Stephen quoted a fellow-traveller who had maintained that in England there is no evening in the year on which a fire is not desirable after sunset. Lady Marland disputed this opinion, and Aubrey took her side, reminding Stephen that inferior as the English climate was to that of Italy, it could at times be more oppressively hot than he at present remembered.

The Bishop alone remained majestically silent, though the brightness of his deep-set eyes showed that his attention was alert. Like the great trout poised motionless in the centre of the pool, who leaves disdainfully to his inferiors a hundred in succession of the morsels that the stream whirls down, and swoops at last irresistibly upon that which he selects for himself, the Bishop seemed to be watching the eddies of the talk for something that might be worth his while to seize upon. The effect of this attitude upon his hosts was fatally embarrassing. They were still unable to guess the precise object of his visit, and, since he was apparently pressed for time, it seemed possible that

at any moment some chance word might give him the opening for which he appeared to be looking, and bring a crisis upon them. Lady Marland made a courageous effort to clear up the situation.

"If this were a winter fire," she said, "we should be thinking of a story or a song."

The Bishop turned to her with ready courtesy; no hint could be too sudden or too delicate for him.

"Either," he said, "would be equally welcome after my journey, and I am sure that Aubrey has both in readiness."

"It is for you to choose, my lord," said Aubrey.

"No, no," he replied; "but let it be one of your old favourites."

She glanced up quickly and met his kind eyes with a look of understanding.

"We used to like Marie de France," she said, "and the Lay of Guingamor best of all."

The Bishop inclined his head; Sir Henry made a whimsical face of relief, as if talking to himself.

Stephen drew his chair a little away from Aubrey's side, and sat back with one hand over his eyes, that he might watch her face in the firelight as she told her tale.

"Once on a time in Brittany," she began; and before the poem had reached the twentieth of its little tinkling lines, he had ceased to hear it except as music, and was lost on a shoreless sea of thought.

He was recalled by a pause in the even flow of the narrative—or was it that Aubrey's voice had suddenly changed, had fallen to a deeper and more significant tone?

"Yet had it chanced, while there he dreamed,
Far otherwise than as he deemed;
For while he numbered three swift nights
Within that palace of delights,
Three hundred years had passed on earth,
And in the country of his birth
Dead was his king, his own folk dead,
Yea, all his lineage lapped in lead,
And all the cities he had known
Ruined by time and overthrown."

Stephen was wide awake now; the words went through him like a wind sighing among pines. He moved his hand from his forehead and fixed his eyes openly upon Aubrey, as if to claim beyond mistake some acknowledgment of the common memories which they two alone, of all in the room, could possess. She saw his movement, and turned in his direction, but her eyes in the half-light were unfathomable, and though her voice was full of meaning, it seemed that no one else found in it more emotion than that naturally demanded by the course of the story.

"So on the third day unafraid
To his dear love he came and prayed
That homeward now he might be sped,
With boar and hound, as she had said.
But she made answer, 'Have thy will,
Yet vain is this thy longing still,

For while with us three days have shone,
Three hundred years on earth are gone,
Thy king is long in darkness thrust,
And all thy kindred dust in dust.
Seek where thou wilt in that dim land,
There shall not come beneath thy hand
One man so old that he may know
The names thou lovedst long ago.' "

Again her voice fell to the close in a quiet, melancholy cadence that moved him strangely. He listened on to the end with growing conviction; the tale had become real to him. It was himself that crossed that river into the old world where he had left his friends, and where now he found their memory long forgotten, and their homes fallen to ruin. It was on him that death, long overdue, was creeping so swiftly when he was once more rescued by his lady, and once more and for the last time recrossed the river into fairy-land. What then? What then? The soft music ceased, and he awoke again; whether to the real world or the unreal, who could tell him now?

"Thank you, Aubrey," said the Bishop; "you have told the story very sweetly. It is a fanciful thing, but there is a deeper touch in it, a reminder of something real behind—at least, as you recited it."

Stephen looked round with astonishment; the echo of his own thought came from an unexpected quarter, but it was none the less an echo.

"It reminded me of the story of Ogier the Dane."

He spoke to the Bishop, but kept watch on Aubrey at the same time. She gave no sign of recollection.

"There are many such legends," said the Bishop; "they are, I imagine, all shadows of one true history."

Lady Marland begged that he would tell them the true story, and the Bishop began at once, leaning a little forward in his high-backed chair, and folding his hands before him so that the firelight flashed upon the great single emerald in his episcopal ring.

"In the last year of his life that high-renowned and puissant Roman Prince, the Emperor Trajan, led out his chivalry to war against his enemies. And as they were riding out through the Flaminian gate the whole plain before the city seemed full of knights and men of arms, and overhead the golden eagles of the Empire floated in the air. Then Trajan saw that a poor woman was standing before him in an attitude of weeping and sorrow; and she made as though she saw neither the eagles nor the host, but only the Emperor, and she laid her hand upon his bridle, and cried to him by his name. Then he asked her, 'Woman, what is thy complaint to me? for I am in haste.' Then she answered, 'My lord, I am a widow; avenge me for my son's death, for it is breaking my heart.' And he said to her, 'Wait now till I return, and I will avenge thee.' But she cried out as one whom grief makes impatient, 'O my lord, but what if thou never dost return?' Then he

answered her, 'If I should never come again, then he that fills my place will also fulfil thy desire.' But she cried again, being carried by her grief beyond respect, 'What is it to thee if another does his duty when thou hast left thine own undone?'

"Then the Emperor fell into a study, and afterwards he changed his counsel suddenly, and said to the woman, 'Take courage; since this is my duty I must perform it before I go. Justice requires it of me, and pity for thee holds me back.' So he returned to the city with all his host, and he searched for the murderer who had broken that widow's heart, and found him; and it was his own son. Then he sent and offered his son to the widow for death or life; and she accepted him to be a son to her in place of her own who was dead.

"Now it happened within the year, that Trajan died, and because he had not known the faith his place was found among the damned. But after certain years the blessed Saint Gregory, seeing that many by the knowledge of the faith came into bliss in despite of their insufficiency and lack of virtue, and remembering the eminent justice of that Roman Prince, was moved to intercede with God for him; and he prevailed against the Devil, and Trajan was delivered out of Hell, and received his mortal body again, and came into the world in all things as a man, to save or lose his soul. And while he lived, he lived without joy, in a grievous exile;

for though he had escaped from a place of torment, yet he passed his days in a pilgrimage without friends or kindred, ever lamenting those who had long since perished.

"Nevertheless, it is to be remembered that in that second brief earthly life it was given to him to embrace the faith of Christ, and to receive baptism, and in the end by short sorrow to merit the eternal Paradise."

The Bishop ended on a more triumphant note than Aubrey, but he too had acquitted himself well; his voice and manner, Stephen thought, were perfect, and touched with a sincerity that no one could help feeling. Aubrey herself exclaimed, with bright eyes—

"O my lord, if I had known! How could you let me shame poor Marie before so great a poet as Dante?"

The Bishop frowned. "I know nothing of Dante," he said. "The story of Trajan was told to me in my youth at Avignon; I brought it over with others, and intended it to go into my new Lectionary at Exeter. If Dante tells it too, that may be a reason for omitting it."

He spoke with a flash of quick feeling, and Stephen rushed in to support Aubrey.

"It struck me too," he said, "that many of the phrases you used came from Dante's version; and surely what he says of Trajan's story in the *Paradiso* is very beautiful—

> "'Then did he know at last how dear it costs
> Not to have followed Christ; for he had tasted
> Both of that sweet life and its contrary.'"

The Bishop's colour deepened. "You are right," he replied fiercely; "that is beautifully said. Honey is honey even in the blasted tree."

There was an awkward silence, broken by Sir Henry with a half-humorous, half-deprecatory air.

"It is a strange thought," he said, "to go back to the world again; I don't know that we should all welcome the chance." He arched his eyebrows as if he saw himself making a still worse business of a second venture.

"My dear father," said Edmund, with an accent of gentle response to Sir Henry's mood, "putting aside your own chances of failure, don't you think it would be interesting to take a look at the world five hundred years from now, and see how it will be getting on?"

The Bishop had quite recovered his serenity, and surprised Stephen for the second time by expressing his complete agreement with Edmund's view.

"I don't know," said Sir Henry; "I don't feel sure. I can imagine myself grumbling even at a better world than this."

"Oh," said his wife, laying her hand upon his knee, "you are a very gloomy old gentleman this evening. You forget that many of your favourite grievances will

have disappeared long before five hundred years are over."

"Will they?" he said. "Very well, my dear; and what of yours?"

"Oh, I know you think mine less serious," she replied, with a droll toss of her birdlike head. "But I am quite sure of one thing: before many years have passed, people will have got tired of these fast young ladies of the present day, who dress more like men than women, and waste all their time and money in going about from one tournament to another."

The rest laughed at this. Sir Henry shook his head solemnly.

"You are quite right there," he said; "there will soon be no money left in the country for such games, and in five hundred years—why, we shall be lucky if there is food for us all by then."

"Why so?" asked Stephen, for whom this fresh turn of the conversation had an interest that could be shared by no one else.

"Why," said Sir Henry, "ever since the Black Death we have not known where to turn for labour. The value of land has fallen ruinously. On the other hand, the more there are to work, the more there will be to feed. If once the population takes to growing again, it will not be long before the land will fail us.

In five hundred years there will be neither bread nor standing-room in England."

Stephen hesitated; the natural answer for him to make was an impossible one. How could a man reasonably claim to state as a fact the condition of his country centuries hence?

"I can imagine," he said, "that Englishmen may find the island too small for them some day; but surely it is possible for the wealth of a country to increase as fast as its population?"

"Possible," replied Edmund; "but only if you are always at war and always victorious. That may happen. As a nation we seem to be more and more unable to keep our hands from war and plunder."

"No, no," said the Bishop, earnestly, "it will not be in that way; we have had enough killing and robbing. By the time you are thinking of there will be no more war."

"I take it," said Sir Henry, "that by that time war will have done its work. I grant that we soldiers are a bad lot; but you won't take it amiss when we have turned England into the Empire, and when the Empire is another name for the whole of Europe."

Stephen shook his head.

"I don't understand you," said Sir Henry. "*You* are not a Churchman, Stephen."

"Henry," said his wife, severely, "you are not witty, you are wilful."

Stephen escaped from the necessity of explaining himself, for Aubrey came to the rescue of her uncle.

"I appeal to my lord," she said; "the Church does not condemn all wars. There is always lawful war against infidels. My view of the future is that in five hundred years the whole world will have been brought to Christianity by force of arms. It will take many glorious victories to do that, and it is a crusade we shall never give up until we have achieved it."

Stephen looked at her in bewilderment. Either she was playing a part—and of that he saw no sign—or she had no memory whatever of the world she was forecasting, the world from which she, like himself, had so lately come.

She saw his astonishment, and seemed to take it for dissent.

"Well," she continued, "perhaps that may take longer than I think; but do not tell me that I am wrong about the growth of the Church Militant. Surely we can see that beginning even now. As men and nations rise, they must more and more leave trade for chivalry."

"What do you say to that, Stephen?" asked Sir Henry.

"If you ask me," he replied, "I foresee that however much fighting there may be in the future, there will be still more trading."

"I won't believe that," said Aubrey. "We can't be a nation of knights and a nation of shopkeepers at the same time."

"So Napoleon thought," cried Stephen; "but he found out his mistake."

He had hardly said the words when he recognized that they were absurd; but his companions did not appear to find them so. It seemed rather that they had not heard what he said, for no one made any comment, and the Bishop's next remark was in reply to Aubrey.

"The school of chivalry," he said, "is a fine one; but it can never be of more than secondary importance. The secular power must always be subordinate to the spiritual, to which alone authority belongs. Whatever may be in the future the relative positions of the military and commercial classes, or of any others, there can be no doubt that the supreme place in the state must be allotted to the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and if we could at this moment look forward over so considerable a time as five centuries, we should certainly see an empire which, whether entirely English or not, will be subject in every department of life to the Holy Father and those to whom he may delegate his divine authority. Here, among a race of self-willed and almost heathen perversity, we are far from that heavenly reign; but it is coming, and to see it with my eyes

I would come back ten times like Trajan, though I had to come not from torment, but from Paradise itself."

The fire of battle rushed through every vein in Stephen's body; but he knew that he could do nothing but harm by taking up such a challenge. In the silence which followed the Bishop's words he regained his self-control, and by a natural reaction passed to an opposite state of feeling, He looked at the Bishop as he sat there in the dying and uncertain light; the majestic figure with the deep eyes and finely chiselled head seemed to vanish and reappear and vanish again in the wavering shadows and brief gleams of the falling fire, and strong and determined though it was in every line, the strength and determination were to Stephen's fancy almost pathetically impotent, the sport of mysterious forces over which they could have no power, but upon which they depended for their fitful intervals of real existence.

A moment later the last log broke and fell with a soft plash into the white dust beneath; only a dull red glow remained upon the hearth; but as the company rose to depart, a tiny gleam sprang again from some hidden ember, and lit up the Bishop as he led the way towards the door.

XXIV

On the following morning the whole household attended an early service in Gardenleigh Church. Stephen, as he followed the Marlands out of the bright sunlight into the shadow of the porch, felt a sudden sense of oneness with them all, which came as a relief after the embarrassments of their last evening's conversation. Then he had been acutely conscious of the inevitable differences between their point of view and his; he could not share their hopes, nor they his knowledge. He had encountered also now and again, since he entered this life of theirs, small novelties of detail, slight enough in themselves, and of no importance in comparison with the real interests in which he was involved. These had passed almost unnoticed as they came before him one by one; they now recurred to his mind in a single moment, but only to set off more clearly the unchanging character of the place in which he found himself once more summoned to prayer, and to disappear finally beneath an overwhelming sense of the unity and timelessness of all devotion. As he entered the plain little nave and saw the chantry arch,

the font full of wild flowers, the kneeling figures of those who had already taken their places, he was moved by a profound and welcome feeling of familiarity. Everything here was as it used to be, and as it would continue, he knew, to be after many centuries; here was order, peace, and the austere beauty of carved stone. The service was in Latin; but to one who had lately come from Italy there was nothing unusual in this; and even if he had never heard it before, he could hardly have failed to hear it aright, for its grave and sonorous language sounded like the native tongue of all religion, and seemed to need but little the interpretation of the intellect.

Not less permanent were the elements of human character which he saw displayed around him—devoutness and indifference, fervour and lassitude, extremes of reverence and conventionality, in their natural and perpetual contrast; and when his eyes turned to the chancel he recognized in the two figures upon the altar-steps two of the fundamental and enduring types between which are divided the priests of all time and every old religion. The Bishop was dominion personified; his whole bearing was a combination of dignity and power. The concentration of his look never relaxed for a moment; but the impression given was of a force as completely controlled as it was determined and untiring—a force whose movements

were harmonious because irresistible. This was the personal aspect of the man. On this side he was visibly linked to earth by the strong passions of earth—passions which had been diverted, concentrated, purified, but never subdued. To this side, too, belonged his individual humility. But he had also an outer and even more striking aspect: he was clothed with majesty as with a garment. The prestige of birth, of wealth, of great ability was a part, but a small part, of the conscious splendour in which he moved. What gave the imperious certainty to his actions and the sound of finality to his speech was the ever-present consciousness of the authority which he wielded as a Prince of the *Imperium Divinum*—that Empire in which Kings are but as servants, States as provinces, and nations and their armies as unruly children.

To all this Edmund offered a complete contrast; he was as lacking in physical strength as in ecclesiastical greatness. He had, indeed, both dignity and power, but it was the dignity of submission, the power of an infinite desire. His frail figure and spiritual face had something about them which touched a finer sense, and his voice could never fail to inspire both peace and confidence; but Stephen felt with a pang that in this world of ours it was not to him but to the other that all the victories would fall. Yet

again he saw that here, too, was an enduring force; and he reflected that in a contest which is immortal there are in truth no victories, nor is any real defeat possible of that which is never destined for death.

XXV

THE Bishop walked back to the house with Sir Henry, and Edmund followed with his mother. All four seemed preoccupied, and Stephen and Aubrey found themselves for the moment forgotten. They came slowly and silently across the bridge together, but when they reached the path an energetic impulse seized them both, and they stopped suddenly and looked at each other.

"It is too soon for breakfast," Aubrey said. "Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere out-of-doors," he replied, drawing a deep breath of the bright morning air.

They turned away from the house, and started at a quick pace up the opposite hill towards the garden. Once in the avenue, however, Aubrey turned along it to the right, and led the way to the opening on the southward edge, where less than two days before Stephen had stood, looking down from the new house to the old. As he now stood there once more, with the familiar scene outspread before him, from the distant hills beyond the lake to the green bower under the down, where the church lay nested upon

still waters, the thought came to him that this was the place and time to put Aubrey's memory to a final test. If she were not playing with him, if she had, indeed, no recollection of the old life out of which she had seemed to draw him into this, then it had been but a phantom that he followed, and, except in beauty and in name, she had nothing of the Aubrey he had loved.

"This is my favourite seat," she said, taking her place upon the low stone wall which bounded the southern side of the garden enclosure.

"Yes, I remember," he said quietly, but with a beating pulse.

"Did I tell you that before?" she asked, laughing. "I am growing old and tedious."

"No," he replied; "but I remember seeing you here."

She looked at him as if uncertain of his meaning, but asked no further question.

"I imagine," he began again, "that this is the place you were thinking of when you said you would rather live up here than down there?"

"Yes," she replied, pointing to a gap in the avenue behind her, which left a clear plateau of level turf between the lines of great trees to east and west of it. "That is where the Gardenleigh of the future is to stand. It will look to the south—I love the south

—and here in front it will have a terrace, with a stone balustrade like the Italian ones, and a round bay in the centre with a sundial, just where we are now."

"I can see it all," he said, "and so I am sure can you."

"Oh," she replied, smiling, "I have seen it so often."

"So have I," he said, looking at her.

Again she was silent, and this time he thought she seemed to understand that he was not speaking at random; but the move was still with him.

"You will leave the avenue standing?" he said.

"Of course," she replied. "It will be a new idea to have the house in the middle of an avenue instead of at the end of one."

"And, as I see it," he continued, "you will not use the avenue for a road at all, but enclose it in the garden?"

She nodded, and then exclaimed suddenly, "But how did you come to think of that? It only came into my mind two days ago, and I have never said a word of it to any one."

"That is how I see the place," he said. "And there at the side of your house we shall sit in the heat of the day under the avenue, and talk of Ogier the Dane."

"Ogier the Dane?" she repeated half to herself. "Where have I heard that name?"

He trembled with hope. She seemed upon the verge of memory; but in a moment her brow cleared.

"It was you," she said, "who spoke of Ogier last night. I meant to ask you some time what his story was."

A sudden idea rushed into his mind. "Come with me," he said eagerly, starting towards the western edge of the gap where they had been picturing the house.

Aubrey left her seat upon the wall and followed him. At the entrance to the high green arcade he turned to face her.

"Here," he said impetuously; "it will be here. Since you have seen so much, is it possible that you cannot see more? Can your dream give place and reality to a house, and show you nothing of those who are to live in it? Do you not know that where we stand at this moment there will one day be another Aubrey and another Stephen, telling old tales upon a sunny morning in June?—Ogier or Guingamor or Trajan—it is all one—a story without time, a story of the land where days are centuries and centuries are indistinguishable? That Stephen of the future—what if he, too, should learn the magic and leave his generation, as others leave their country, to go into a land of exile five hundred years away? Have you no

feeling for that exile? If he stood before you now, lost to all his world, and alone in yours, would you deny him a word of sympathy and understanding, a sign that you knew him from the rest, from the unsuspecting native-born inhabitants of your own century?"

He spoke almost vehemently, but Aubrey looked at him with clear, unconscious eyes.

"It is a new story," she said warmly, "and a thrilling one. I have often thought that there is just that difference between people. Some have a kind of reality in themselves, and might belong to one age as well as to another. Some are like reflections: they seem only to exist because certain other things and persons exist. You," she continued, with a delicate direct sincerity in her voice, "are one of the real people to me. I think in any century you would always be living; and I am not unsympathetic. I do recognize that you have come from a different world into this little old-fashioned corner of ours—as I have, in a way, myself. So there are all your questions answered."

She smiled and held out her hand to him, turning at the same time to move in the direction of home. He responded mechanically, but he scarcely felt the pressure of her fingers in his growing apprehension.

"The tale I am telling now," he said, "is truer than you think. I am speaking of a Stephen you

seem to have forgotten, a Stephen who has literally come from a different world, filled with recollections of you. Does this seem mere folly, or do you remember anything of the Aubrey for whose sake he has come—come by this very path, from the new house to the old?"

She coloured a little, but looked at him with frank, happy eyes.

"I am afraid," she said, "you think me wilfully forgetful; this is not the first time you have expected my memory to match yours. I wish it could. I feel that we are old friends, but I remember very little of those days, except"—she continued with a flash of mischievous daring—"except that I had a childish admiration for a boy I used to meet here."

For one brief instant his heart leaped, then fell almost to despair. This was a kind and beautiful lady, but she was not his Aubrey, for he was not the Stephen she remembered. He had spoken to her of yesterday; she answered him with recollections of a childhood which had no counterpart in his own memory. As they re-entered the cold, deep shadow of the courtyard the house frowned upon him like a prison; he felt that he had indeed come far, and lost his way.

XXVI

THE Bishop was in haste to continue his journey. To-day was even cooler than yesterday, he declared, and he was determined to leave Gardenleigh an hour before noon. There was, therefore, no longer any possibility of evading or postponing the dreaded moment of crisis. After breakfast the orders for departure were sent out to the stables, and Edmund, as he sat with the two ladies and Stephen in front of the house, was nervously expecting from one moment to another to be summoned to the solar, where the Bishop was closeted with Sir Henry.

At last the garden door opened, but to every one's surprise it was no messenger, but the Bishop himself who came out, and he came alone. He was more dignified and masterful in appearance than ever, but his face showed nothing like a frown, and his voice was measured and courteous.

"There is still the matter of business upon which I came," he said to Edmund. "I have just mentioned it to your father, but I am loth to trouble him with it further than is absolutely necessary. If you could

spare half an hour to walk with me, I think I could soon put you in possession of my views."

Edmund flushed deeply, and exchanged a quick look of understanding with his mother. Gratitude rang in his voice as he replied that he was ready then and there.

"Perhaps your friend will give his counsel too," added the Bishop; and Stephen quickly assented—so quickly that he saw too late the cloud that came over Edmund's face. He realized, however, that it was caused by a doubt of his own discretion, and determined to keep a tight rein on his feelings; the more so as he did not altogether share Edmund's relief at the unexpected method adopted by the Bishop.

Lady Marland and Aubrey looked on silently and with some agitation while the three men left the house together and moved away along the lake-side. But the Bishop, so long as they were within earshot, continued to talk with Edmund in a cheerful, unstrained tone that was reassuring to hear; and Stephen, who was walking a step behind the others, turned back and waved his hand encouragingly. Aubrey waved her right hand in reply; her left was thrown round Lady Marland's shoulder with a charming gesture of protection. Whatever she was, she was no phantom; and Stephen felt that her friendship with him, even if it were based on a double misunderstanding, was at any

rate justified by a real sympathy. He was thinking more of this than of the affair in hand, as he followed his companions along the well-remembered path; but when they halted halfway down the lake by a fallen tree-trunk which lay by the water-side, he was sharply recalled to a more appropriate train of ideas. This was the place where he had once sat with another friend and discussed the position and claims of the Church. It seemed fitting and inevitable, as even the strangest incidents in a dream appear to the sleeper fitting and inevitable, that the Bishop should pause just here, and stand looking out over the sunlit water and the broad expanse of water-lilies.

"What I like so much about Gardenleigh," he was saying pleasantly to Edmund, "is the orderliness of it; such as it is, it is always at its best, for everywhere it bears the mark of obedient and industrious care."

He took his seat as he spoke upon the fallen trunk; Edmund remained standing before him; Stephen leaned against a tree at the Bishop's right hand, a position from which he could see the faces of both, and appear to make one of the party while holding aloof from the conversation as far as possible.

"My father," said Edmund, in reply to the Bishop's comment, "has the soldier's love of discipline. I often wonder he ever allowed me to choose a profession different from his own."

"I have no doubt," said the Bishop, "that he was rightly guided there. He saw that in the matter of discipline there is no difference between the two. Loyal submission to authority is the first principle of both; of the Church, indeed, even more than of the army."

Edmund was silent, and Stephen realized with dismay that the line of attack was one which would begin by putting his friend out of action, and end by drawing himself almost inevitably into the conflict.

"It is in the name of discipline that I have come here," the Bishop continued earnestly, "and I do not think I shall have come in vain, if you are the true son of your father. It is to you that I make my appeal rather than to him, because the sacrifice which I am about to ask of you all is a small matter to the rest, and a heavy one to you. The friendship between your family and the Tremurs is of old standing, but it is no longer so intimate as it once was; since the death of his parents Ralph is the chief representative of it on the one side, and yourself on the other."

"My mother has always been very fond of Ralph," said Edmund.

"Your mother is a beautiful and tender character, but her tenderness is one with her religion. If any earthly love of hers were put in conflict with her love for the Church, she would not hesitate. I have not

wished to trouble her peace of mind by recounting the terrible words and deeds of one to whom she has shown so much kindness; she will believe you if you assure her that they are indefensible, and not fit to be named among Christians."

At these words Edmund's pale face flushed suddenly, but he kept his self-control, and his voice, though it trembled a little, retained its low, sad tone.

"My lord," he said, "I could not ask my mother to believe on my authority that which is not within my own knowledge. The facts will be not less painful to me than to her; but surely I must know them if I am to guarantee them."

"The authority," replied the Bishop, "is not yours, but mine. I have already told you that what I hear of Ralph is not fit to be repeated."

Stephen here made an involuntary movement, as if to come into the discussion, but a glance from Edmund checked him. The Bishop, however, had seen what passed; he had from the first, for reasons of his own, intended Stephen to take part in the conversation, and he now addressed himself to both the younger men at once, taking as he did so a more genial tone and manner.

"Come," he said, "let us reason together, and think no more of facts or persons for the present; right and wrong are independent of our affections. The question I put before you is one of duty. It is not one which

arises now for the first or the last time; it is involved in the very fabric of human society. It is the question of the obedience due from the individual to the Order into whose hands has been committed the whole direction of that society. I ask you to forget upon whom this claim is now made, and by whose unworthy mouth it is now put forward; think of it simply as the claim of the Church upon the loyalty of man."

Stephen could restrain himself no longer. He moved forward so as to avoid Edmund's warning eye, and faced the Bishop directly.

"My lord," he said, "forgive me if I speak from a point of view which is not your own, but upon what do you base this universal claim to blind obedience? In what sense can the interests of the Church be identified with those of human society?"

"There is nothing to forgive," replied the Bishop; "it is a great part of my business in life to answer that question, and I may begin by saying that I do not in the least expect to find a difference between your point of view and mine. We probably all stand upon the same ground; where we may differ is in the clearness and completeness of the survey we take from it. I agree with you in repudiating the claim for 'blind obedience.' If there is to be obedience, it should be based on a scientific conception of the nature of human society."

Stephen could not conceal his surprise; he assented cordially to this proposition.

"Such a conception," continued the Bishop, "cannot be derived from our knowledge of the world of nature, for it must be rational; nor from the idea of a distinction between races or nations, for it must be universal. The community we are thinking of must include all mankind, and our idea of it must take into account spiritual as well as material existence. I need hardly remind you that there is not, and has never been, more than one such conception of the world. In the Christian view, and in that view alone, mankind is one vast community, under the supreme government of God, from whom all subordinate rulers derive their authority directly or indirectly. This society, this Whole, is divided and subdivided again and again into parts, until we come down to the unit or individual. Every one of these intermediate parts has a double aspect; it is a Whole with reference to its own parts, and at the same time a Part of the Whole above it. Now, since this articulated commonwealth of the human race is a true organism, a mystical Body, it must have not only one government, but one law. Its law is this, that the Whole must always come before the Part, the One before the Many, the Community before the Individual."

Stephen would have spoken, but Edmund was before him.

"My lord," he said, "I can but say that I humbly assent to all this; it has been part of my education as a priest. But human life has two sides; and when you deal with me, not as an ecclesiastic, but as a member of my family, surely the case falls on the secular side."

"It is true," replied the Bishop, "that man has two destinies—one Spiritual, and one Temporal—presided over by two Orders of authority. Nevertheless, he is not himself two, but one. We cannot be content with any system which would separate his two existences; there must be some higher unity in which they are fused. Of the two Orders, can we doubt which of the two is that which must include and dominate the other? The One State can only be the *Civitas Dei;* the One Authority must be the Church."

Edmund could go no further; it was not for him to plead against the authority of the Church. But neither could he leave the argument to be taken up by Stephen where he had dropped it. He must escape from this dangerous ground, however abruptly.

"May I remind your lordship," he said, "that it is not the supremacy of the Spiritual Power which is in question now; what we are permitted to discuss is rather the sphere of its activity. Ralph is a priest, and undoubtedly subject in every way to ecclesiastical authority. Will not your lordship be satisfied with

his submission, if his friends can bring him to that frame of mind?"

"No," said the Bishop, sternly; "submission is not enough. There must be recantation *ex animo*, and that you will never get from him."

"The submission and penitence may be real," said Edmund, "though the opinions remain; and how can any authority change them?"

"What the physician cannot heal the surgeon amputates," replied the Bishop, shortly, rising from his seat.

"Ah! my lord," cried Edmund, with despairing earnestness, "forgive me if I offend, but there must be some quiet place between expulsion and agreement where opinion may breathe a silent freedom. I know well that it is the inward union, not the outward, that best deserves the name; but is it not also the rarer and more difficult of attainment? What is agreement, as between man and man? My brother and I may indeed use the same words, but who can tell if they bear the same colour to his inward sight and mine? It is our hearts, and not our intellects, that must be one. If the heart submits, can the intellect deserve the outer darkness?"

A stormy cloud of anger was gathering on the Bishop's face. He turned suddenly away from Edmund, and spoke to Stephen in a voice thick with the coming thunder.

"And you, sir, how would you have me deal with the conforming heretic?"

Stephen's blood was up; he was glad of his opportunity.

"My lord," he said, "it would be of little use for me to adopt your standpoint, even if I could do it. I should still see the world differently, for what is black to you is white to me. What you call heresy I call a salutary difference of opinion. I am a Christian and a well-wisher to the Church; but my view is that it is by such differences that the Church benefits most. Give them free expression, and answer the dissentients if you can. Whatever the result of the argument may be, you will stimulate intellectual effort and invigorate faith itself. Besides, you will keep the minds of your people alive to the fact that the aspect of truth is continually changing. Hitherto the Church has always been taken by surprise. All that you get by suppressing inquiry is an unwholesome sleep, from which your patient wakes bewildered. The fact is that authority is no remedy for doubt; it is only a drug that must be administered in stronger and stronger doses. In the end it fails altogether, and you get paralysis."

The Bishop's brow contracted, his head leaned forward over his chest, and his eyes gleamed like the points of two spears levelled irresistibly at Stephen.

"I asked for your opinion," he said, "and I cannot

complain if you have given me nothing but words, for you have nothing else to give. Learn from me in return that life is not a school of rhetoric, where the divine government of the world is an image, an ornament, a figure of speech like any other, and where the truths by which men's souls are saved are fit subjects for a thesis or a disputation. You have been listening to the same eloquent devil who has led Ralph Tremur into the most deadly of all heresies, who has taught him to deny the Sacrament in which all other Sacraments are completed, perfected, and confirmed; the food by which the people of Christ are daily refreshed spiritually that they may not faint by the way; the gift, than which it is impossible to imagine anything more worthy of our acceptance or more conducive to the salvation of men; the mystery in which is most triumphantly displayed the power entrusted to God's ministers on earth. You speak at large of salutary differences; but I tell you that this man preaches and affirms in public and in private otherwise than as the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church believes, preaches, and affirms. He dares erroneously and heretically to assert and maintain that the bread and wine are not changed substantially by the words of Consecration; which manifestly, and beyond all doubt, is to subvert entirely the Catholic Faith, to make void every one of the Sacraments, and utterly to destroy

the truth of the Gospel. Is it by the hearing of such blasphemy that we shall refresh our minds and stimulate our faith? If Authority is a drug, what is this? Is it not the venom upon the mad dog's tongue, and shall we not justly harden our hearts to cut out that poisonous tongue and cast it forth among the swine?"

The blow had fallen. Its violence had taken Stephen's breath, but left him unshaken; he felt like one who has expected a crushing swordstroke and encountered only a handful of sand. He was none the less embarrassed, for though he saw a hundred joints in his opponent's armour, he saw also that the distance between the Bishop and himself was too great for any weapon of his to reach them. Besides, he repented already of his own impetuosity, and was apprehensive for his friends rather than for himself.

Before he could collect himself Edmund's quiet, sad voice interposed.

"Let it be me, and not Stephen, to bear the blame for having angered your lordship. It is all the fault of my weakness in not asking at first what is exactly the nature of the service required of us."

The Bishop saw the opportunity; he turned with a more gracious manner to Edmund, and the vehemence died out of his voice.

"The Church is merciful," he said, "and so long as there is any discretion left to me you may be sure,

Edmund, that old friendship will weigh heavily in the balance. Perhaps you have been unjust to me in your thoughts. When I spoke of casting out, it was no extreme penalty with which I threatened Ralph. For excommunication I should not need to ask your help; but I have determined to offer one more chance to a man who may, after all, be more mad than consciously depraved. I am about to issue a letter to the officials of my diocese, setting out the facts and enjoining upon all my people that until this unhappy man has returned to his right mind they are to abstain from all manner of dealing or intercourse with him, and to refuse him every necessary of human life. It is possible that, even at the eleventh hour, this may bring him to a sense of his true situation. He has now but few friends left outside the diocese, and where they are, like yourselves, in a position to give him shelter or support, I am calling upon them, in the name of their duty to the Church, to consider themselves as much bound by my proclamation as if they were actually members of my particular flock."

Edmund made no answer in words; his eyes were fixed upon the speaker's face, but they seemed to convey no message to him. The silence again gave the Bishop his opportunity.

"Do not think," he continued more kindly still, "that I mistake anything you have said, Edmund, for

resistance to the voice of the Church. Your desire to save your friend Ralph is a right desire, and one for which I honour you. It was upon this feeling of yours that I relied in coming here, and I am glad to find that it is not less deep and faithful than I had hoped. Wild and reckless as he has been, it is difficult to believe that he will not pause to reflect when he finds that he is losing the countenance of even his best and oldest friends."

Edmund was still silent, and Stephen wondered whether the Bishop's attitude was purely diplomatic, or whether he was in reality convinced of the completeness of his victory. Whichever was the case, he appeared to be satisfied, and as they came in sight of the house once more his voice was once more sounding a cheerful and reassuring note. But no one could now mistake Edmund's look for anything but depression, or Stephen's for anything but angry and ill-subdued defiance.

XXVII

TEN minutes later the whole party was assembled in the courtyard. Two horses only were waiting there, for the servants with the baggage had left nearly two hours earlier, and the Bishop, who meant to overtake them at Sherborne, had refused all escort or company in order to be free to ride his own pace from the moment of his departure.

Lady Marland and Sir Henry bade him good-bye from the step of the porch. Both of them, Stephen knew, must in truth have been relieved to see him go, but this feeling seemed to be completely overlaid in her case by her warm hospitality, and in Sir Henry's by an old man's reluctance to part from a friend for what might be the last time.

"Good-bye," said Lady Marland, in her high little voice. "I wish you could have stayed to dinner; but you will find something in your saddle-bags to remind you of us when the time comes."

"Good-bye," said Sir Henry; "and if I live to see you here again, I hope you will spare us a day or two more—perhaps when Guy and Harry are back from France."

"You may be sure," said the Bishop to them both, "that I shall not forget your kindness, and that I shall come again as soon as I can. I have many troubles to contend with nowadays, and few old friends to help me. I am the more grateful to those upon whom I can still depend."

He looked round for the others: Aubrey was in the middle of the courtyard, feeding the horses with withered apples from the storeroom, but Edmund and Stephen were close beside him, and his gesture seemed to imply that his last remark was intended for at least one of them as well as for their elders. His parting words to Edmund made this clearer still.

"It has been a great pleasure to me," he said, laying his hand on the younger man's shoulder, "to find you here. I shall always be sorry that you are no longer in my diocese, but I am happy to think that your father has such a son within call."

Edmund looked steadily at the Bishop, but in spite of his self-control his face showed nothing but pain.

"Do not praise me, my lord," he said, with an effort; "I am very far from deserving it."

"No; it is not for me to praise you," said the Bishop, quietly; "but you have the great gift of self-surrender, and I am thankful for it."

Edmund's lips trembled; he was on the point of some less ambiguous protest, but the Bishop had

turned from him with an air of finality, and was addressing a curt and formal farewell to Stephen. This done he moved towards the horses, and bent over Aubrey with a grave and almost sorrowful courtesy.

Stephen looked quickly back at Edmund, and from him to his parents: he saw them all three as victims helplessly enmeshed in the web of cunning. Edmund at least was in rebellious mood; but even he had let the time go by: henceforth the struggle would be no longer with the spider, but with the net, in whose entanglement every movement would involve them all more hopelessly, for the net was woven of honour and of circumstance. In his desperation he felt that he must break the spell at any cost and in any way; it mattered little what was said or done, so long as this fatal acquiescence was torn asunder and the possibility of resistance once regained. He had no time to think: in a moment he was standing by the Bishop, who was in the act of mounting.

"My lord," he said, in a voice so full of emotion that the Bishop turned in his saddle and looked down in surprise, "may I say this before you go: I fear that you are carrying away a false impression; that you have misunderstood the spirit in which your request has been received."

He stopped in evident perturbation, and for once the Bishop's insight failed him. It was natural enough

that this young friend of the Marlands should have come to his senses, and seen the outrageous impropriety of his language of an hour ago; his submission came at the last moment as a fitting completion of the morning's work, and the manner and voice of the penitent seemed to leave no doubt as to his sincerity. The prelate's face relaxed and his tone was of the most gracious.

"I am more than glad," he said, "to hear this, and to hear it from you."

For a moment Stephen was bewildered; but there was no time to ask himself what had happened. All that he could see was the miraculous change in the Bishop's manner; he saw, too, in a instant how to use his opportunity.

"There is one thing," he said, "one little thing, my lord, which I beg you to consider. Could you not grant a private audience to Ralph Tremur before you take this step against him? It would mean a great deal to us."

In his eagerness to enforce his petition by every possible influence, he had almost unconsciously taken Aubrey's hand in his. She hardly understood what he was about, but she saw that he was very much in earnest, and did not draw it away. Her apparent confusion put a new thought into the Bishop's quick brain, and again he deceived himself. Stephen, as he now

saw him, was not only a young man moved by an excellent impulse and a friend of the Marlands; he appeared to stand in an intimate relation to Aubrey, for whom no tenderness could be too great. The gracious face softened still more, and the voice became almost paternal.

"If it would mean so much to you," he said, looking down upon them as they stood hand-in-hand before him, "I will do what you ask. I will give you twelve days from to-day. If within that time you can find Ralph and persuade him to come to me, I will see him. I shall be at Chudleigh. But remember," he said, gathering up his reins, "I cannot wait beyond the octave of the Holy Trinity; and whether he comes or not, I warn you against the bitterness of vain hopes."

He raised his bridle hand and was gone, without looking back. The next moment the beat of his great horse's hoofs thundered on the steep path behind the house, mounting at a pace that seemed to the listeners to have something of the ruthlessness of war.

Edmund was standing by Stephen and Aubrey; he had heard with amazement the Bishop's last words, and his face was radiant.

"What have you done?" he cried. "Do you know what you have done?"

"Not quite," replied Stephen, looking at Aubrey.

"Can you find Ralph?" asked Aubrey, eagerly.

"Find him!" said Edmund. "He is here! That was our danger, and you have saved us, Aubrey."

"It was not I," she replied; "it was Stephen."

Edmund looked from one to the other; it was incredible that the Bishop should have granted anything to Stephen. But since they both would have it so, he was content.

"Well," he said, "I do not understand; but between you, you have accomplished a miracle. And now let us all go and bring Ralph home."

Stephen, too, had been puzzled, but his conversation with the Bishop was now coming back clearly to his mind, and he suddenly perceived the explanation of his own success. It was an embarrassing discovery, for he might well seem to have profited knowingly by a misunderstanding. As he passed out through the pathway he was conscious that Aubrey's eyes were upon him, and he wondered uncomfortably how his conduct appeared to her. But when he looked round she smiled in reply with sparkling eyes.

"Yes," she said, "that was a splendid stroke of yours. You took him quite by surprise."

Clearly she had understood little or nothing of what had passed; but he still wondered whether he ought not to explain. Then he remembered that the

Bishop had made two mistakes, not one. Of the second, at least, nothing could induce him to speak.

"Come," said Edmund, turning back to them, "the sooner we can tell Ralph, the sooner I shall believe it myself."

XXVIII

Ralph was at Curtrey Hill, a farm scarcely more than half a mile from Gardenleigh House, but lying over on the Buckland side of the estate, and completely screened from the park and road by the continuous line of high woods. He had arrived almost immediately after the Bishop's first messenger, and had been taken over to his place of hiding only just in time to avoid the second. His presence there had been successfully concealed from Lady Marland and from Aubrey, but the knowledge of it had added greatly to the anxiety of Edmund and his father, who were only too well aware of the risk they ran if by any unlucky chance or rashness on Ralph's part a meeting should take place with the Bishop on their own ground. They must have been drawn into the conflict before they had had any chance of consulting with Ralph or pressing moderation upon him; they could not have abandoned him to his adversary, as they certainly would have been called upon to do. The resulting situation must have been the worst possible for every one concerned.

"What we have to do now," said Edmund, as they walked rapidly up to the head of the valley, "is to let

Ralph talk himself out, and then get a promise out of him."

"Exactly what we have done with the Bishop," replied Stephen. "Is there so much resemblance between them?"

Edmund was in high spirits; he laughed heartily at this question.

"I wonder," he said, "which of them would be the more insulted! You could not imagine a more perfect contrast; each has just the qualities that are entirely wanting in the other. You have seen the dignity, the unction, the governing force, the constructive ability; the other will show you the fanaticism, the rough common sense, the learning, and the destructive critical power, in which the Bishop neither has nor would wish to have any part. The Bishop's intellect was from the first mortgaged to his creed; but there is probably no proposition known which Ralph has not denied at one time or another. However, you will see for yourself."

"Do you know him?" said Stephen to Aubrey.

"Oh yes," she replied; "I have seen him more than once, long ago. I remember I was very much afraid of him; he used long Latin sentences, and asked me strange questions. Once he told me that there is no such thing as time."

"Oh!" said Stephen, flinching from his own

troubled recollection of their early talk upon the terrace. "What did you say to that?"

"I was angry," she replied, "and he asked me why. I said that I would not believe him, because I wanted to grow up; and he said that the soul never grows up."

"I remember," said Edmund; "but that was years ago, when he was full of poetry and mysticism, before he took service with Science. I am afraid he is only too certain now that his own soul has grown up."

The light had gone out of his face as he spoke, and his companions said no more. A moment afterwards they reached the farm.

Ralph was not within, but he could not be far off, for he had only just left the house. The path by which he was said to have gone led them off to the left of the road, by the side of a long hedge which divided a field of pasture from a much larger stretch of plough-land. Where the pasture ended they turned round its angle to the left again, and saw not far before them a gate which led back into the park. On the other side of it two standing stones rose from a mound of turf.

"Those," said Edmund to Stephen, "are the oldest of all our monuments; they are called 'the Gardenleigh Stones,' and are said to have been erected by the Druids for some purpose connected with their heathen sacrifices."

They passed through the gate, and Stephen, as he stooped to refasten it, heard a sudden exclamation. He turned quickly, and saw Edmund hurrying forward to greet a man who had evidently been sitting at the foot of the great stones, and who was now standing placidly in front of them with a peculiarly broad and shining smile upon his face. Was it possible that this was Ralph Tremur, the famous Oxford scholar, the man of science, the great anti-ecclesiastical champion, the proto-martyr of Protestantism, the one mind of all his generation to foresee the trend of modern thought—if, indeed, he was not rather the progenitor than the prophet of the change to come?

Stephen's fancy conjured up the figure of the Bishop beside him as he stood there upon the little knoll of green turf, and compared the two antagonists; his disappointment was keen, for the contrast was sharp, and it was at the first glance entirely in favour of the prelate. There was no appearance of birth, dignity, or learning about Ralph; every line of him was plebeian, almost coarse, and but for the fact that his brown beard and untrimmed curly hair were strangely out of keeping with his priestly dress, his whole figure would have seemed ordinary in the extreme. He looked young for his forty-five years, but there was nothing graceful to compensate for the lack of dignity, and his face was conspicuously wanting in beauty or refinement: the

features were too thick, the eyes pale, the nose spreading, the lips too full. Stephen remembered to have seen just such a broad, smiling countenance in a grotesque representation of the sun. But the smile was a good one, he felt, both kindly and confident; and he knew, as his hand fell into a grasp much wider and stronger than his own, that here was, at any rate, a human and a lovable character. A moment later he had discovered that, though every feature of this face was plain, there was not a trace of ugliness in it; and he found upon further reflection that the combination of so much that was commonplace made up, after all, the distinct expression of a personality unlike any he had ever known.

"I suppose from your all coming here," said Ralph to Edmund with the greatest good-humour, "that my right reverend Father in God is no longer with you? Ah! if only you could have let us meet!"

"I can," replied Edmund. "I have come to arrange it."

"Good!" said Ralph. "Where is he?"

"On the road to Chudleigh; he expects you there."

"Oh!" said Ralph; "not here!" His voice sank to the tone of disappointment naturally enough, but to Stephen's astonishment it suddenly rose again into a gust of the most violent and uncontrolled rage. "The fox!" he cried; "the foul, sleek fox. He has played

with you, do you hear? and he thinks he can play with me. It is not on fair and open ground that he will meet me, but down there in his own vile den, among his own long-toothed cubs, where truth and reason stand no better chance than they would in Rome itself!"

His face was distorted and debased with anger, and the sound of his own words as he spat them forth seemed to increase his fury rather than relieve it. It was in vain that Edmund tried to put in a word of explanation; the torrent carried away everything before it.

"I tell you," he went on fiercely, "that I know the man, and you do not; to think of reasoning with him is the crazy bravado of drunkennes. He is an assassin, a murderer of the helpless and unarmed, a perjurer who swears away innocent lives and never takes an honourable challenge. Do you know what he has said of me?—how he has warped my words and turned them against me, like a secret poisoner at a man's own table? Listen! Silence! Listen! In my argument against the authority of Rome, I said that Peter the fisherman was no head for a Church of Cardinals and Princes; no Pope, no sacrificing Pontiff, no Potentate of Purgatory; but a plain, good countryman, with little in his head but country matters. This Grandison of yours knew well enough! He could not meet me there; he charges it

against me instead that I spoke of the Blessed Saint Peter as an empty-headed rustic; and that I blasphemed Saint John as a liar and his Gospel as false witness, because I reasoned in my sermon on the criticism of the Scriptures that a man cannot be heard to say both that he is one that beareth witness, and also that he voucheth that his witness is true. What cares he for truth, or what does he understand of it? If he stood here before me now, must I call him traitor and cold-hearted coward, or dunce and numbskull, ass and the colt of an ass?"

It was not so much the unrestrained vehemence of the man that shocked Stephen so painfully, but the disappearance from his face of all that had ennobled it. Nothing remained but the vulgarity, and from the sight of such a complete and sudden degradation Stephen found himself instinctively averting his eyes. Edmund had taken Tremur's arm and was drawing him, still vociferous and uncontrolled, along the edge of the wood towards the path by which they had come. Aubrey and Stephen turned away to the right over the grass, and made more directly for the house, which they reached without having exchanged more than half a dozen formal sentences.

XXIX

EDMUND and Ralph were not at dinner, and it appeared, upon inquiry, that neither of them had been seen near the house. Aubrey explained to Lady Marland what had happened, and a discussion followed on Ralph's peculiarities, which had been well known to the whole family since very early days.

"He's a queer fellow," said Sir Henry; "but he's a dear fellow, too, for all that."

"Henry," said his wife, in a tone of pugnacious warning, "I hope you are not going to defend him when he does wrong."

"Well, my dear," he replied, with a droll look aside in Stephen's direction, "I'm a bad-tempered man myself, and I always think there's something to be said for temper."

"You are not bad-tempered," said Lady Marland, severely—"at least not to that extent; if you were, you know that you would be unendurable to everybody."

"That may be," replied her husband with serene irony; "but Ralph is not unendurable to any one who really knows him, and I can tell you why."

"Of course he has his good qualities," said Lady Marland. "I hope we all of us have."

"No," said Sir Henry, "it is not only that; it is that bad temper is not so much a vice as an ailment, and a very painful one, much to be pitied. Most people learn that, and act on it—at least most men do." He glanced again at Stephen as an audacious schoolboy glances at a quieter companion.

Stephen thought it might be well to save his hostess from further aggravation, however humorously administered.

"I confess," he said, "that I was really troubled by what I saw this morning; it was so complete a transformation, and so ugly. But I can quite understand what Sir Henry means about such faults not making a man unendurable to his friends. We don't love our friends for their qualities, and obviously we don't hate them for their faults, if they are really friends."

"I wonder what it is exactly that we do love them for," said Aubrey.

"For themselves," replied Stephen — "for their personality."

"What is it, then," she asked, "that makes them themselves?"

He looked across at her, and a long train of thought formed in his brain so rapidly that every link of it seemed to have gone past before he could seize and

arrest it. Three days ago he would have been in no such difficulty; but since then the question had taken an unheard-of form, and here was the Sphinx herself asking him the riddle of her own existence.

Aubrey saw that he was lost in a reverie; but his gaze remained fixed upon her, and she knew that her aunt was looking quietly at both of them, speculating probably on the meaning of the sudden silence. She rose rather hastily, made some trifling request, and left the room.

"Aubrey says odd things at times," Lady Marland observed to Stephen, who was still absorbed in his own thoughts; "but there is no harm in being a little unusual; she is as good as gold, and never cross-grained."

He came back to consciousness at this, but it took a moment or two for the mental context of the remark to become plain to him. When at last he perceived the trend of her thought, he felt his cheeks burn suddenly, as if with a sharp blow.

"No, indeed," he said, "she needs no defending." And he added lamely, "I was not thinking of her at all."

His embarrassment seemed to give Lady Marland complete satisfaction; but at this moment a servant entered the room and announced the arrival of a messenger for Stephen. He supposed it to be a man from the farm, sent by Edmund, and went out at once to the

courtyard, glad enough to escape, as Aubrey had done, from a position of unavoidable awkwardness.

The messenger had come on horseback, and evidently from a much greater distance than Stephen had conjectured. He brought a small but heavy packet, which he was commissioned, he said, to deliver only into the hands of the gentleman to whom it was addressed. Stephen took it accordingly, directed him to stable his horse and come back to the house for refreshment, and turned away, with knife in hand, to cut the string of his parcel. But as he was in the very act, recollection came upon him like a flash from a distant mirror, startling and puzzling at once. From whom in the world—from whom in this world—could the thing have come for him? To the Marlands only, of all their generation, could he or his presence here be known; and from his own lost world what message or what messenger could follow him?

In part, at any rate, these questions could be solved at once; but his mind was so busy that his fingers still delayed, and it was not until he had passed through the hall, and returned to the room where he had left his friends, that he opened the parcel at last, and removed the outer wrapping. Inside was a smaller but more solid packet, and a letter on which his own name was once more inscribed.

He read the letter twice. The writer, a steward of

his own, apparently, on an estate in Warwickshire, informed him that he was sending, as requested, a sum of money representing one-fifth of the rents paid at Lady Day, and requested his instructions as to the remainder, which, whether in money or in kind, he now held at his master's disposal. The packet contained a round sum in gold, and Stephen perceived by a very simple calculation that his income from this source was a considerable one.

It might well have occurred to him to doubt his own right to this property, but a certain disappointment at the commonplace nature of the letter, and a sense of difficulty in replying to it, for the moment entirely engrossed his thoughts. Afterwards a curious feeling grew upon him that the whole transaction, troublesome as it was, was not troublesome for the first time; the familiarity of it became more and more impressed upon him, till something like memory began to stir about it, and he was no longer sure that he had not actually given, or dreamed that he was giving, the orders which his agent had obeyed. But that was later; at the first moment he was conscious only of the difficulties of the situation, and instinctively he passed the letter across the table to Sir Henry, without committing himself to a word of explanation.

Sir Henry read it in his turn, laid it down, and took up the money.

"If I understand it rightly," he said, "this is a fifth part of your rents for the half-year, or one-tenth of your annual income. But what you want with so much money here, I cannot imagine."

"Oh, money is always useful," replied Stephen, vaguely. "I can't tell when I may be needing it."

"In the mean time, I suppose you want me to put it away for you in a place of safety?"

He counted the gold pieces out upon the table. Stephen took two of them, and packed up the rest again.

"I'll see to that at once," said Sir Henry; and he left the room accordingly.

"My dear Stephen," said Lady Marland, when he had gone, "this is a welcome surprise to me. I had no idea your father had left you so well off; I imagined he had parted with that Warwickshire property long ago. There is no house on it, is there? You might settle down near us, and look about you for a wife. But perhaps you have thought of that already?"

"You are very kind," he replied in his most formal tone, "but there are difficulties of which you can hardly be aware."

She looked encouragingly at him, but he said no more.

XXX

THE afternoon went by without any sign of Ralph and Edmund, and at supper their places were still vacant. In the gallery Lady Marland had again ordered a wood fire; but it was a smaller and much less animated company that sat around it this evening. Continual expectation continually disappointed is a frame of mind very unfavourable to any kind of gaiety or enjoyment. Every one's thoughts had been full of Ralph, and it seemed very dull to pass the whole day within reach of him and yet be unable to tell him of their efforts and discuss his plans with him before the freshness of their interest had worn off.

Stephen felt conscious too that his own attitude to-night was not adding to the cheerfulness of the party. He was tired after a long and exciting day, and in no mood to cope with the perplexities of his own position. The sense of exile, and even of imprisonment, which had fallen upon him early that morning had been forgotten during the more stirring part of the day, but now returned with double weight. He was almost angry with Aubrey both for being what she was, and for not being some one else. He was quite angry with

Lady Marland for her evident desire to intervene in his affairs when she could not possibly understand them. These feelings were, he knew, utterly unreasonable, and the knowledge added to his discontent; but he was too weary to play more than a defensive part, and nothing better occurred to him than to avoid as far as possible the society of both the ladies, and attach himself to Sir Henry for the remainder of the evening. This he accomplished without difficulty.

Aubrey and her aunt accepted the situation with apparently unconscious serenity. They busied themselves with needlework, spoke but seldom, and then only to each other and in low tones, without once attempting to join in the men's conversation, or indeed giving any sign that they heard it at all.

Sir Henry, on the contrary, discoursed freely and on many subjects, and his ready flow of conversation not only made matters easy for Stephen, but gave him plenty of mental distraction. The talk came back, of course, at last to Ralph and his affairs, and showed that Sir Henry had formed a very clear and decided view of his own upon the case.

"We are all prepared," he said, "to back Ralph; but I'm not sure that any of us agree with him. Some of us"—he gave a confidential nod in his wife's direction—"don't like his temper; Edmund disapproves of his theology; I am happily too ignorant to understand

it, but I can see that it is the wrong leg to put forward in a fight."

"But surely that is past help now," said Stephen. "The quarrel is on that very point; it is not either the right or wrong leg, it is the territory for which the battle is to be fought."

"Very good," replied Sir Henry; "but you don't mean to tell me, as a soldier, that the territory for which I fight must necessarily be the ground on which I make my stand? We must choose our position for the best advantage; if we win there, we win elsewhere too. Ralph's quarrel is a double one. He claims that the Church is in error about a certain doctrine; but whether he is right or wrong, he will never get any following there. He also claims that his friends among the laity are entitled to receive and support him in spite of his Bishop's condemnation. Now, I don't say he is certain of success there either; but if he fails, it will not be for want of a certain amount of backing, up and down the country. We are a very stupid lot in England; we have had it explained to us for many years past that Popes and priests are our lords and masters, but we have somehow never taken it in. You have been away, Stephen," he continued, with a serious voice and a mocking arch of his eyebrows; "you probably do not know to what lengths our national stupidity had gone. His present Holiness has been at

great pains to teach us that the Church rules the State and he rules the Church; but within these last five years Parliament has twice gone wrong, and said its lesson upside down. First they denied the Pope's power to interfere with the right of presentation to benefices in England, and then they forbade any appeal to Rome from a judgment of the King's courts. The penalties attached were pretty severe too—outlawry, imprisonment for life, and so forth. In fact, Stephen, they may be said to have put a certain amount of obstinacy into their misunderstanding; and if they are called up again before His Holiness, as they are very likely to be, it would not surprise me to hear them repeat the whole mistake still more emphatically."

"You mean," said Stephen, smiling, "that the whole country is in a rebellious mood?"

"It is, over just this question of Church and State; and that is where I think Ralph's chance lies. If he remains in his own diocese and preaches heresy, he is answerable to his own Bishop, as every priest should be; it is only reason. But if he goes elsewhere, there is a good chance of his countrymen being as unconvinced by the Bishop's logic as they were by the Pope's. And, after all, we laymen are still in a majority."

At this point Lady Marland rose, put her work back in her basket, and took Aubrey away to bed.

"If you continue to receive Ralph," asked Stephen,

as soon as they were gone, "do you expect the Bishop to go to extremes?"

Sir Henry frowned. "I wish Ralph would ask himself that question," he replied. "The Bishop will do what the Church always does; he will go just as far as he can carry public opinion with him. Fierce as he is, he always puts the Church's interest before his own feelings. He certainly will not get people like us excommunicated if the question of this particular doctrine is kept in the background; but if once he can get Ralph tried on the point of Transubstantiation——"

The door opened, and Lady Marland reappeared. "Henry," she said, with her firmest intonation, "I don't know what you are talking about, but I don't think your views on sacred subjects can do Stephen any good, especially at this time of night."

The two men rose meekly, and wished each other good night.

XXXI

On the following morning Edmund returned to breakfast. He brought a promise from Ralph that he too would come over during the day; but the exact time was uncertain, for he was occupied in drawing up and arranging the heads of his argument against the Bishop. Sir Henry made a humorous gesture of despair, and succeeded in putting more despair than humour into it. Lady Marland expressed with precision her opinion of the manners of this very unconventional guest. Aubrey made excuses for Ralph as a man of genius. The windmill, she said, must work when the wind is blowing, if it is ever to work at all.

"Windmill, truly," said Edmund. "You should have seen him!"

An hour afterwards Ralph no longer needed defending, for he came in person, and his mere appearance instantly disarmed all criticism. Stephen found himself once more under the necessity of revising his judgment of this extraordinary man, who was now as courteous and as charming in manner as yesterday he had been the reverse. Any one seeing him in this mood for the

first time would have taken good-humour to be his most prominent characteristic, and must have admired the look of bright distinction which a very plain set of features derived from the sincerity and sweetness of their expression.

His own affairs seemed to be entirely laid aside; he talked of everything else, and made himself agreeable to every one. He took Aubrey out in the boat, brought her back when the sun became too hot on the water, and listened for an hour to Sir Henry's views on the land and the labourer. At dinner he entertained the company with stories in the Devon dialect, and afterwards he volunteered to escort Lady Marland as far as one of the lodges, where she was holding her Wednesday class for the instruction of half a dozen tenants' wives in plain sewing and morals.

He returned alone from this walk, and found Edmund and Stephen leaving the house to join Aubrey and her uncle, who were sitting under the trees on the edge of the down. As the three men took the little green path which slanted up the hill, Stephen remembered that he had climbed it once before two days ago, and that in the very nook where he could now see Aubrey's white dress among the shadows he had sat alone that morning, a traveller newly arrived from the other Gardenleigh, and not yet an inmate of this one. He had walked in a strange tangle since then, but for

the moment he forgot it all as a clear voice came down the slope to greet their approach.

"We wondered," said Aubrey, "how long you would be before you followed us; it is deliciously cool up here—just the place for theologians."

Ralph sat down beside her. "Was it here," he asked his two companions, "that you had your battle yesterday?"

"No," replied Edmund, pointing to the fallen tree by the water-side; "it was down there."

"I am glad of that," said Ralph. "I should wish always to take my stand on higher ground than the Bishop."

"Take care, then," said Aubrey; "even a Bishop might look down upon that joke."

"Not this Bishop," Ralph replied gaily; "he has come down far lower. He once said that my position was as shaky as my name."

A chorus of incredulous laughter greeted this statement; but as it died away Aubrey's quick eye saw the shadow descend again on Ralph's face.

"Would you mind," she asked him instantly, "if I were to change places with you? I am cramped with sitting so long in one position."

The move was effected with a good deal of disturbance, and when every one was once more settled the danger had passed. Ralph, however, was still in a

more serious mood, and Sir Henry looked grave as he saw him draw out and unfold a sheet of paper closely covered with a fine handwriting.

"What is that, Ralph?" he asked. "It looks rather strong meat for young ladies and old gentlemen, doesn't it?"

"Oh no," replied Ralph, grimly; "I have taken pains to make this plain enough for understandings far below yours. This is a set of theses addressed to the Bishop; if you will allow me, I will read them to you."

"One moment," said Sir Henry. "Has Edmund seen them?"

"Not yet," Ralph answered; "but he is familiar enough with their substance to be able to comment on them at once if he feels inclined."

He straightened out the paper and began to read.

"Against certain opinions commonly received and held upon insufficient or erroneous grounds, and more particularly brought forward at the present time by my Lord Bishop of Exeter, I am prepared by reasonable argument to maintain the following propositions, namely:—

"First, that Christendom is conterminous neither with the inhabited world in its entirety, nor even with the circle of nations known to us, and justly reputed for learning and chivalry. It follows that if, as the Bishop alleges, the whole human race is included under

one divine *Imperium*, such a government must be conducted on wider and more comprehensive lines than those of the Christian Church."

"The world is certainly not all Christian," said Edmund; "but you speak almost as if you did not think it desirable that it should be."

"No," replied Ralph, "I do not say that; but I do say that we Christians have no right to despise or ignore those of other religions. Consider what we owe to Aristotle and Plato, to Seneca and the Stoics, and in modern times to Alfarabius, Avicenna, and Algazel—not only philosophy, but ethics. The Saracens would not gain much by taking in exchange the morals of Avignon or Rome."

"There is something in what you say," remarked Sir Henry, "and we know that our great-grandfathers accepted Saladin's people as brothers in chivalry; but I doubt if public opinion would stand even that nowadays."

"I disagree with you entirely," replied Ralph. "Whatever the English may think of a nation's religion, they think a good deal more of its fighting capacities. They would no more shrink than the kings of Spain and Portugal have shrunk from an alliance with a heathen power—black, brown, or yellow—if they were sure of its diplomacy and military genius. Our own Prince will not hesitate, you will see, to join

any alliance that may suit him, if there is no graver objection to be met than the presence of the Moslem as a party to it."

"Well," said Sir Henry, doubtfully.

"We have wandered a little," said Ralph; "but you see what I mean: the claim of the Church to govern all men by Divine right is based on premises which are contrary to the facts of the world. I pass on to my second point: That even in Christendom itself, if there be, as the Bishop alleges, only one State and one Head, then this Head must be not the Pope, but the Emperor; not the Spiritual but the Temporal Sovereign, the Church being part of his Realm, and completely absorbed in it. I need not argue that; it is all in Ockham, and Marsilius of Padua has said the same thing."

"All the same," said Stephen, "I can assure you that the Popes will never abandon their claim to be the overlords of all Temporal Powers."

"Then we shall abandon *them*, that is all," replied Ralph.

"In any case," said Edmund, "your second point will not convince the Bishop, Ralph; go on to the third."

"The third is this: That even if the spiritual are to take precedence of the secular forces in any state, this cannot be accomplished by the domination of the Church as we see it. A visible Church must always be an impure image, with a body and probably a head of clay,

and far from comprehending, even in its parts of genuine gold and silver, all the precious metal in the world. The true Church of Christ is no elaborately organized system, no corporation with a legal skin of parchment, no noble caste with titles and grades of rank; it is an invisible body, a fellowship which, being based upon nothing but religion, can be entered by all the religious, and by no one else among men; a community of the predestinated—those who, as Bacon says, taste even in this life of the peace which is the sweetness of the life eternal. In such a community what need or place is there for the tyrannous authority of Popes or Bishops? And close upon this follows my fourth point: That even if, as my lord alleges, the Christian world is divided and subdivided between a hierarchy of powers, it is not true that each division in turn is of more account than its parts, and they again of more account than the individuals which compose them. On the contrary, it is always, in the spiritual life, the Singular which must come before its Universal. God has created this world and devised salvation not for the sake of Universal Man, but for the sake of individual persons. There is therefore no community, no Whole or partial Whole, which is entitled, as the Bishop alleges, to claim from any man such blind obedience to authority as would be harmful to his own soul, or to the cause of truth."

"My dear Ralph," said Edmund, "you are going a little too fast; you must not assume that we all assent to all that you have been saying."

"I do," said Stephen.

"So do I," said Aubrey, eagerly.

"But perhaps," said Edmund, "you do so without having clearly before you the difficulties of such a position. Is there nothing in union and organization that you abandon them so lightly? Can you have a community worth the name if it is not conscious of its own corporate existence? Will not the individual find his life widened by the sense of an acknowledged brotherhood, and will not his powers be greatly raised by his knowledge that he is associated with and led by others stronger and better than himself? And is it not well that in some part of his worship he should be joined with his fellows, that here too he may learn to rid himself of the selfish element, and express that which is common to all men?"

"If the average man," said Stephen, "is raised by associating with the better, he is also lowered by contact with the worse. If too much individualism is a source of weakness, over-organization produces deadness, which in the spiritual life is far more fatal; and you have forgotten to consider truth and science at all."

He was conscious as he ended that he had spoken

too hotly and in too personal a tone. But Edmund seemed untouched by it; his interest lay too deep for personal feeling, and he replied as quietly as if he had been musing on a book that he had read.

"It is too often forgotten," he said, "that the Church is itself a scientific institution, and concerned with truth. It is continually occupied in investigating the Christian life as a method. As with other scientific bodies, one of its main functions is to check isolated results, to secure continuity and permanence. Its experiments are carried on over centuries of time, and in them is gathered up the experience of an immense number of witnesses, living and dead. The life, the method, which is the subject of this unremitting inquiry, it teaches to all who will learn, from their early youth to their last conscious moment. The truth which it possesses and imparts is no doubt imperfect, for it has passed through human vessels; but it is just because the Church is an organized body, and not a dispersion of individual atoms, that this truth has been preserved and handed on at all."

"Where I differ from you," said Ralph, "is on the word 'imperfect.' What the Church calls truth is not only partial, but largely erroneous—a survival from less enlightened ages than ours, and repugnant to our reason and our present knowledge. Individual examination and criticism would long ago have winnowed it

as other scientific and philosophical truth has been winnowed; it is just the preservation and handing on of which you speak that have done the mischief. And that brings me to my fifth proposition, which is this: That even if in the Church the individual is rightly subject to authority, yet neither Pope nor Bishop can claim to impose upon the conscience of men any belief which is demonstrably contrary to the true text and meaning of Scripture, or to facts established by the human reason. How carelessly they have come to rely upon the brute force of authority may be seen in their treatment of the Biblical text—the most important evidence, as you must admit, Edmund, of the truth committed to their keeping. They have not only not purified it, they have handed it on in a condition more corrupt than that in which they received it. It is now full of errors, some of grave importance; but they systematically discourage and disable the scholars who would go back to the original Greek, and restore the older and better supported readings. And yet, while they are so careless of the letter, they cling with superstitious and ferocious tenacity to every syllable of the interpretation and the doctrine handed down to them from the dark ages, and shut their eyes wilfully to the evident progress of knowledge. Truth, they say, cannot change. No, but it may be sifted, confirmed, and completed; and even then its aspect will change

as our standpoint changes. In this last hundred years such a change has been going on rapidly. Man has realized that 'by the use of Nature he can do all things,' and he has set himself to discover and conquer the powers of the material world. Look at the inventions of the past fifty years—the invention, for instance, of paper, of explosives, and of the mariner's compass. The possibilities involved in such things as these are incalculable; but the Church neither hears, thinks, nor cares until the work is done, and then it steps in to hinder and condemn it—for what? For *novitas!* And no wonder; for where there is novelty of fact, there will be also novelty of view."

"Still, said Edmund, "your new facts and your new views must be tested. They should be no more exempt from examination than the old ones."

"I will tell you," replied Ralph, with scorn in his voice, "how the Church does the testing. I will give you a modern example. Here is this new book of travels by the fellow who calls himself Sir John Mandeville. Never was testing more needed; but I have just heard that it is to be passed entire by the Holy See. And why? Because it appears to tally with some fusty old map of the world which the Popes have had lying by them for centuries, 'Appears,' I say; and this is where the point comes—if these holy noodles had but looked a little more thoroughly, they would

have found not only a hundred lies and stolen stories in the book, but one piece of truth quite fatal to their *Mappa Mundi*. The traveller says that it is possible, he finds, to go by ship all about the world, both above and beneath. The world, in fact, is now proved to be not flat, but round, as many have long suspected, and some have half-openly maintained, both in Oxford and Paris. Wait till the Church wakes up to this, and you will see an example of her alternative method of testing scientific truth. Her officials are always the same—at least, they always oscillate between careless ignorance and reckless ignorance."

"They are human," said Edmund, gently. "I think you ask more of men than men can give you."

"No," retorted Ralph; "I ask nothing but tolerance."

"That is hardly an answer," said Sir Henry, arching his eyebrows with one of his humorous looks. "But seriously," he continued, "if you will let an old man put in a word, I think these very well-drawn propositions of yours have led us a little away from practical considerations. We are all with you, Ralph, when you speak of truth and tolerance; but common sense will not allow me to forget two things. One is that the Church, perfect or imperfect, is one of the facts of the world—one of the largest facts, a fact which can never be abolished or ignored. It does not matter how or why this is. It lies somewhere in the

nature of things; it is one of the features of the landscape, and in planning the battle of life you must take it into account, or your campaign is hopeless from the beginning. The other thing is that you have carried your argument beyond the point which is of immediate importance to us. It is most interesting to hear your views on such subjects; but these questions of science and dogma are, for us, outside the argument. We have only to consider how we can hope to justify our position if we support you when you have been condemned by your ecclesiastical superior. We are not directly subject to him, as you are. We wish to maintain our freedom as laymen; but we cannot let ourselves be drawn into the theological controversy. Our case depends entirely on our keeping the two questions separate. You must see that."

"I see what you mean," said Ralph, in a tone of disappointment; "but you are cutting me short at the most vital point of all. My sixth and last proposition deals with the doctrine of Transubstantiation."

Sir Henry inclined his head. "I thought it might possibly do so," he said, with courteous gravity, "and I have no doubt that it is well worth hearing in itself. But even if I were not so incompetent to form an opinion upon it, I must still keep myself at present quite clear of that part of your challenge. Edmund, of course, is in a different position here, and so is

Aubrey; they may discuss anything with you. But if you will excuse me, I will ask Stephen to give me his arm as far as the house."

He rose with some assistance, laid his hand for a moment kindly on Ralph's shoulder, and started down the hill, leaning on Stephen.

"I might have taken Aubrey instead of you," he said, "but she has a quieting effect on him; and you can go back directly if you would care to hear him out. He will be at it for a long time yet."

XXXII

QUICKLY though Stephen returned, he found that he had missed Ralph's sixth proposition. It had evidently been stated with some violence, for both Aubrey and Edmund looked troubled, and Edmund was speaking in his lowest and most gentle tones.

"My dear Ralph," he was saying, "you cannot imagine how you pain me. You know that I am not bigoted or unsympathetic; you know how far I have gone with you in this matter, long ago. But when you abandon your own lofty and spiritual standpoint, and threaten to meet crude materialism with still cruder and more material methods of disproof, you seem to me—forgive me for saying it—you seem to be setting yourself below the lowest of your antagonists. They err in understanding, but their error, however grotesque, comes in its origin from reverence; you would err in feeling, and no vindication of your senses or your intellect could make up to you for that."

"I only meet them on their own ground," said Ralph. "They allege a physical change; I propose a physical experiment."

Edmund shook his head. "You forget," he said,

"that it is meeting them with poisoned weapons: they could inflict nothing on you comparable to the mortal pain they must suffer at your hands. And there is something in yourself that you would injure too. You know that there is a mystery here beyond the reach of any material proof. Remember the words of your own champion, Bacon. You could accept his statement of the doctrine, and so could your opponents. Why not be content with that?"

"Bacon is not my champion here," replied Ralph; "on this side he was as blind as the rest."

"I read him differently," said Edmund, "and so did you once. Remember how he expressly says that although both the Human and the Divine Nature are present in the Sacrament, yet the Human Nature is not present as we know it elsewhere. It is in itself, he says, a thing created; but it there transcends the laws which govern created things, and exists after the manner of the Divine being, and not of the material creature."

Ralph was quite unaffected by the gentleness and reverence of the tone in which Edmund had spoken. His face was set, and his voice harsh with contentiousness.

"What is the use," he said, "of all these mystical phrases, when he follows them with the plain statement that the Real Presence is hidden in order to save our stomachs from revolting?"

Edmund turned and looked at Aubrey. Her face was flaming, but there was no sign of flinching in her eyes.

"Go on," she said imperiously, laying her hands on Edmund's; "you must answer."

"Ralph is quite right," he said; "there are words to that effect, but the context throws a different light upon them. Both the Divine and the Human Nature, Bacon says, are hidden under the symbol, because our senses could not bear the majesty of the one or the reality of the other. He does not mean to dogmatize about the exact manner in which we should otherwise have had to face that reality. What he does say is that we are permitted to look upon it in the Sacrament with our mental vision only. In the same way he speaks of the words of the Mass always as words of the heart, as well as words of the mouth. For him there is nothing mechanical about it; belief comes foremost: 'To gain eternal life we need but have faith in our hearts and a sentence of five words upon our lips.' And by 'eternal life' he means not a mere future existence in another world, but an immediate union with the Divine. This alone would exclude all possibility of a gross material interpretation; for he says that we are so fed in the Sacrament as to become that upon which we feed, which can happen with no material sustenance, but only with the

spiritual: 'By partaking of the Christ we become each one of us a Christ.' These are the words, remember, of a great man of science; will they not satisfy you too? They would certainly satisfy the Bishop."

"I do not believe it," replied Ralph. "They did not satisfy the Pope: Bacon was condemned."

"For his view of the heathen philosophers, not of the Christian religion."

"Well," said Ralph, obstinately, "I don't care what the Bishop may think of him, he does not satisfy me. You cannot get over the fact that he places the Real Presence in the Host, and I do not. There is a wide gulf between us there, and I cannot be certain I am right unless I use my own words."

"I should have thought," replied Edmund, "that in speaking of a miracle none of us could ever be certain that he was right; and least of all a man of science."

"Paradox is not a good method of persuasion," said Ralph, curtly.

"No," replied Edmund; "but consider a moment. Is there not really a great difference between the mind that seldom sees a miracle because it is so stored with science, and the mind which is constitutionally incapable of wonder? The truly scientific mind may come to think all existence miraculous; for when we have made all the easy generalizations, and discovered all the proximate causes, we begin at last to

realize the depth of the mystery that lies behind them all."

"Then leave me to select my own miracles. I will wonder where I please, and not at the bidding of an ignorant Pope-made prelate."

"Be fair, Ralph," said Edmund, in the gentlest possible tone of remonstrance. "It was not the Pope who made him your Bishop; you voluntarily placed yourself under him when you were ordained."

"I never bound myself—I could not bind myself—to take my creed from him."

"No," said Edmund; "our beliefs are our own; but we have bound ourselves to obey. We think as we must; but we cannot preach what we are forbidden to preach."

"Speak for yourself," cried Ralph, his voice trembling with a sudden access of rage. "I will do that and more. Let every Bishop in England hunt me up and down, I will say my say. I make my appeal to my countrymen. I know their minds; I am no intruded foreigner, no half-bred Burgundian, but an Englishman of the right Apostolic succession, by which there shall never be wanting men duly qualified to serve God in the holy office of heretic while the world lasts. Grossetête is gone, and Bacon, and Ockham; but they laid their hands on me, as I have laid mine on young John Wyclif. He shall do the work when I

am gone; but while I am here no man shall take my place from me. As for my lord Bishop, I give him a Bishop's answer, 'With filial piety and obedience I disobey, I deny, and I rebel!'"

He was white with passion as he shouted his defiance; but this time Stephen was moved by his fierce courage, and saw nothing in his face to shrink from. Aubrey, too, he could see, was at the least divided between regret and admiration; but Edmund's whole figure expressed a sadness that seemed to crush him, as if he bore already the invisible load of the misery to come. As they all rose to go homewards he passed his arm through Ralph's, and seemed about to speak. But he was silent until they reached the foot of the slope; then he said in a low voice, as if he almost hoped that he might be unheard—

"I remember the words, and what was said of him who uttered them: 'He attacked many; he was attacked by most; and he knew not what peace was.'"

"So be it," said Ralph.

XXXIII

It soon became evident that Ralph and Stephen had taken a strong liking to each other. For the next three days they were inseparable: they walked together by the hour, they talked incessantly and argued interminably, and still, when they came to table, challenged each other as eagerly as if they had been meeting again after a separation of years. It surprised Stephen to find that he was far from agreeing with Ralph as completely as he had expected; it astonished every one else to hear him controverting his new friend a dozen times in the hour without once bringing down upon himself the storm which a chance word from others had so often provoked. Frank, rude, even brutal, Ralph certainly was at times; but he never again fell into that insensate passion of rage, and Stephen thought that he could distinguish the cause of this seeming inconsistency. It was not opposition that maddened Ralph; on the contrary, he loved strife and could give and take the hardest of hard knocks. But the mere suspicion of an unfair advantage, the faintest hint that any one could claim to use force, to bring authority to bear, to crush reason by the weight

of will, would turn his broad, sunlike smile to the scowl of a wild beast, and in less congenial or less tactful company would have once more let loose the savagery of his under-nature. In Stephen he recognized something of a kindred spirit, one who would resent the intrusion of force on his own side as quickly as on the other, and was by nature hostile rather than submissive even to legitimate authority. Stephen, therefore, might say what he pleased, and contradict without hesitation. He certainly tried his antagonist to the full, for he attacked Ralph in plain terms for want of feeling; asserting with a great deal of truth that he constantly made the mistake of treating human beings as automatons, made to be moved by uniform springs, and worthless or defective in proportion as their actions were derived from affection or choice rather than from the steel coil of reason.

"A fault on the right side," Ralph shouted, in reply to this charge. "Get men to show some feeling for my science, and then my science shall take some account of their feelings."

Stephen shook his head. "I am all for science," he said, "but its professors are but human. The time will come when they will set up an orthodoxy of their own, and make a church whose bishops will interdict religion."

He was astonished at the effect of his words.

Ralph was not only silenced but extinguished by them, and Stephen afterwards saw him more than once glancing curiously in his direction, as if troubled with a question which he did not like to ask in words. He was himself, however, too preoccupied to think more of it, for Edmund had made over to him the task of persuading Ralph to go to Chudleigh and lay his case before the Bishop in a reasonable manner. He had very little expectation of being able to do this, for Ralph shied violently whenever he was led within sight of the proposal, and openly accused the Marlands of thinking more of their own position than of the cause of truth. Stephen could, and did, meet this easily enough, for it was only their desire to help Ralph that brought them into the question at all; but he was not quite on firm ground, for he felt that he was not at one with the Marlands in their view of Ralph's relation to the Bishop. They persistently ignored—as, indeed, did Ralph himself—the fact that this was not the simplest case of insubordination—the case of a parish priest disobeying his ordinary. Ralph had resigned his living many years ago, and had never again sought preferment in the diocese, though he had passed much of his time in it for family reasons. He seemed, therefore, to Stephen to be in the position of the many University tutors who are but nominally in holy orders, and who for practical

purposes owe no allegiance to any ecclesiastical superior.

"No, no," said Sir Henry, when the point was made clear to him; "there is nothing in that. Once a priest, always a priest; a man cannot unfrock himself."

"But suppose the Church unfrocks him?" asked Stephen.

"Then all is over. There is nothing left for him in this world but the life of an outlaw—precarious, base, and short. Only his friends can save Ralph from that now—if he would but see it, and do something to help."

But the days went by, and Ralph gave no sign of yielding. Edmund, however, showed a patience and forethought which moved Stephen's admiration. He could not compel Ralph, but he could be ready, if he should succeed in persuading him even at the last moment. He had already exchanged his duty with John Perrot, the young Rector of Gardenleigh, who had been at Portishead for over a week now: the time was extended by a letter sent off without Ralph's knowledge, and a secret arrangement was also made with the neighbouring parson of Croonington, by which Edmund was set free to go away, if necessary, at a moment's notice; for he meant to do all that was possible not only to bring about the interview, but to make it a success.

Sunday had come and gone, and Stephen, when at the end of the day he found himself alone in his own room, remembered that there was now but a week left of the time conceded by the Bishop. The thought kept him long awake. In the keenness of his new friendship, and his burning interest in Ralph's quarrel with authority, he had for the time almost ceased to trouble himself about his own situation. He could never rest till he had recovered the hopes which he had lost; but in that direction all the ways were wrapped in impenetrable darkness. In the mean time, here was a path which lay clear before him, and he followed it with eagerness. In the old life Aubrey had been for him the one real figure among a crowd of phantoms. If the Aubrey of this world was herself a phantom, at any rate she had brought him among very real people, and set him on work more real than any he had ever taken in hand before.

His feeling had changed a good deal in these four days. He had begun as a partisan of Ralph's cause; he had ended as a friend of the man himself, and this involved a different view of the course to be adopted. The main point was not so much to defeat the Bishop as to save Ralph; the Marlands were right after all. What could be Ralph's own object in dashing himself to pieces against a rock? If he perished, as he must, would not his work die with him? Was it not to the

slow, undermining influence of time that he should trust, rather than to a direct attack, however forcible? The future was safe; Grandison was a sterile tree, his theories alien to the soil of England, where Ralph's mustard-seed of science would one day strike root and spring up like a forest.

So he reasoned with himself as he lay there in the warm, dark summer night. It was midnight, and sleep was still far from him. Through the open window came the rapturous shouting of the owls as they swept softly through the mazes of their ghostly chase; now and again from the reed-beds by the lake a low, guttural sound was heard across the still water, as if one among the host of waterfowl were crying in his sleep; then for a time all fell once more to silence. But Stephen had a feeling that for him the silence was not that of solitude. Somewhere in the house, he was certain, his wakefulness was shared by another watcher, and he waited, with every sense alert and pulse quickening, to catch the sound which should put an end to his suspense.

No sound came; but in the silence and the darkness he became aware, by some other channel than the everyday senses, that the door of his room was opening —that it had opened wide, and that he was no longer alone. He seemed to himself to have asked again and again, "Who is it?" but he knew also that he had not

spoken, and the time of waiting was surely longer than his whole life. Then suddenly a quiet voice, that seemed to part the silence without breaking it, came out of the darkness close to him.

"Are you awake, Stephen?"

The strain was loosened in a moment; the blood which had stood still in his choking veins flowed with a warm rush through his whole body, and his throat relaxed.

"Is that you, Ralph?" he said in a calm, low voice that hardly seemed his own. "What is it?"

Ralph drew the curtain that darkened the window, and Stephen saw that the night was not so black as it had been an hour ago; the sky was no longer overcast, and the moon was shining. Ralph closed the door and came and sat down on the side of the bed.

"Stephen," he said, "I am going to Chudleigh."

At any other time Stephen would have been surprised into an exclamation; but he was saved by the quick perception and control which the brain acquires in the hours of darkness; he knew that he must wait to hear what this decision meant.

"Yes, I am going," Ralph continued; "but to what end? Have you thought of that?"

"I have thought of nothing else for an hour past."

"Of course," said Ralph; "I knew that. But you

think, like the others, that I ought to save my bones."

They were both silent, as if they could wrestle it out in their thoughts without words. But when Ralph spoke again, he had changed his grip unexpectedly, and took Stephen by surprise.

"Tell me," he said, "do you know, or are you only guessing, like the rest of us?"

"Do I know what?" asked Stephen; but he knew the answer already.

"I have heard in the North," said Ralph, "of men with a second sight, which is more penetrating than our deepest wisdom; since it is unknown in the Church, there may be something more in it than superstition. In your own opinion you seem to have some such gift; every day you speak of things to come as if you saw them. I do not ask you for your secret, but if you know what is hidden from me, you can give me the clue to my labyrinth."

For a moment Stephen thought he could speak out: truth, that we clothe so carefully by day, may strip herself at midnight. But as he saw his chance he saw the danger too, and the uselessness of incurring it. If he were not believed his influence would be gone, and in any case it was only the distant future that he knew; of Ralph's own fortunes he could foretell nothing.

"I am confident," he said; "but I claim only to know as you know—by my reason."

"That is not the whole truth," said Ralph. "The confidence I speak of did not come from reason: you did not assert yourself, you forgot yourself." Then, as no answer followed, he added in a low, urgent tone, utterly unlike his everyday voice, "Stephen, do not play with me; I am dare-devil enough at times, but life is as much to me as to any one—more, a hundred times more, for I verily believe that I carry Man and his fortunes in this storm."

In the growing light Stephen could see him bending forward with an earnestness that smote him to the heart. How idle, how academic and hollow seemed the life from which he had come, to which he would one day return. It was here in the backwoods of time that the real work of men was going forward, with sweat of the brow and blistering of hands, with action and agony and endurance in place of talk and speculation. How poor a thing was he, cheering on the battle that for him was already a victory, compared with this man who was girding himself to rush blindly upon the spears. How he longed to help him; but though the whole great saga lay open before him, he knew that Ralph's own fate was nowhere upon the five hundred pages he had read of it, and he groaned inwardly, for it was of Ralph that he was thinking first.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I am not playing with you; you must not think it. I have a sight of some things that this generation cannot see, but it does not show me what you ask."

"I ask only this," said Ralph: "shall I live or die?"

"You are a man," replied Stephen, "and it needs no gift to know that every man must die. But your cause will be living five centuries from now as it is living to-day, and far more strongly. Is not that enough?"

"Enough?" cried Ralph, starting up. "What more could I have asked?"

"I was thinking," said Stephen, lamely, "of your own life, and the survival of your name."

"My name!" said Ralph, with a touch of scorn mixed with the triumph in his tone. "What is my name to me five hundred years from now? You may name the river what you will, if only I may know that it will reach the sea."

"You need not fear," said Stephen; "it will reach the sea."

"That is my life, then," said Ralph; "you have answered me after all. Good night."

It was not till he had been gone some time that Stephen remembered the advice he had intended to press upon him. In what had passed between them

there had been no talk of prudence or moderation; that must be for to-morrow.

But when he woke it was already too late; Ralph had clamoured to be off at daybreak, and Edmund had not ventured to oppose him.

XXXIV

THE week passed slowly and quietly; every one spoke of hopes, and no one of misgivings. But probably it was no great surprise to any one when, on Saturday evening, as they sat at supper, the door opened silently and Edmund took his place by his mother with an air of dejection for which no fatigue could be accountable. The Bishop, he said, had been ill. They had reached Chudleigh at noon on Wednesday, only to be told that his lordship, though better of his fever, could see no one for some time to come. A letter would be delivered to him if desired, but not at once. In short, the expedition had failed.

"You left a letter, of course?" asked Sir Henry, and hearing that this had been done, he brightened considerably. "After all, Edmund," he said, "the position is saved for the time being. Our side is not in fault. There is no reason why the meeting should not come off later."

Edmund did not raise his eyes from the table. "I hope it may," he said; and his father, seeing that there was more behind, lifted his eyebrows and was silent.

The ladies took up the burden of conversation until the meal was over; then, when the servants had left the room, there was an embarrassed pause, every one waiting anxiously for Edmund to speak.

"You have not told us yet where Ralph has gone," said Lady Marland at last.

"I do not know," said Edmund, wearily; "he is a hard man to help. It is almost too late to hope the Bishop will ever see him now; too late, perhaps, even to wish it."

"What has happened?" asked Stephen, with a sinking heart.

"I will tell you," replied Edmund; "perhaps you will see it less gloomily than I do." He drew himself up in his chair, and looked in his self-forgetful way straight into his father's face as he told his story. "We got on well," he said, "until we reached Exeter. There we heard of the Bishop's illness. I was afraid Ralph would take the opportunity to cry off . . ."

Stephen shook his head.

"No," continued Edmund; "he insisted, on the contrary, that the illness was feigned in order to avoid the interview, and that his own policy was to force himself upon the Bishop. Happily, this was impossible, and before noon we were on our way back to Exeter. I asked him to come on here with me, and he seemed inclined to think of it. We decided to stay

one more night in Exeter, and I hoped to get him away next morning. After dinner we went to vespers in the cathedral; the nave has been finished since I was last there, and the music, as it soared up and chimed under the stillness of those great arches, seemed to me the most wonderful thing I had ever known in my life, and the nearest to the heart of human wisdom."

"The wisdom of the Psalms is Divine, not human," said Lady Marland.

Stephen had scarcely time to feel the jar. Aubrey was already stilling it as no one else could have done.

"No, dearest," she said, "Edmund is right. The music of chanting is all human; it is the sound of the troubles and hopes of time going up into eternity and dying away under the roof of heaven."

"The child's right," said Sir Henry, and Stephen thought so too.

"When the music ended," Edmund continued, "I found that Ralph had gone without my knowing it. When I came out of the west door, there he was on the upper side of the street, standing on a bench and preaching wildly to a crowd of rustics and idlers. Before I could reach the place, I felt myself pushed roughly aside, and a posse of monks rushed past me into the crowd and made for Ralph. He was forced from his bench; but the monks were evidently unpopular, and the street was filled in a moment with a

mob who hoisted Ralph on their shoulders and drove his assailants off the ground with shouting and cheering that could be heard a mile away. Since that moment I have seen nothing more of him. I inquired, as widely as I dared, what had become of him, and I was able to make sure that he had left Exeter before night—they said he had gone westward, probably into Cornwall. Could anything be more disastrous?"

"Nothing could possibly be more selfish," said Lady Marland, severely.

Aubrey looked at Stephen as if she expected something from him.

"I feel sure that you are mistaken there," he said to Lady Marland. "I had some talk with him the night before he left, and he certainly was not thinking of his own interests."

"He certainly was not thinking of ours," remarked Sir Henry, in a tone of unusual bitterness.

Stephen felt rebuked, but an approving look from Aubrey did something to redress the injustice.

"And what are you going to do now?" he said to Edmund.

"Go back to my work, and wait for daylight," he replied.

"Right!" exclaimed Stephen, and he looked as if he would have said more, but Sir Henry stopped him.

"*You* will not leave us too?" he said in a tone

between anxiety and reproach—"such a broken-kneed old pair."

Stephen looked at the worn, sad, indomitable face, where humour still flew like a flag above the ruins, and his heart pledged him without authority.

"Leave you?" he cried; "not while I can help you," and for the moment he felt strong enough to bear it out.

Then, like a stunning blow came the realization of what his promise involved, and through the confusion he heard Lady Marland's high little chirp of satisfaction.

"Thank you, Stephen," she said; "that is just what I should have expected of you."

On the following Monday Edmund left for Portishead.

XXXV

Now that alarms and conflicts no longer urged him to activity, Stephen passed day by day more completely under the spell of the warm, heavy west-country air—a spell which from late June till early September lies upon the valleys of Somerset with a dreamy enchantment that is almost oppressive. Being himself of Midland descent, he had not inherited that immunity against the softening influence of climate, or that unalterable restlessness of energy and imagination, which have carried the glory of the West over the world, and which he had lately seen so strenuously exemplified in Ralph Tremur. His mind, it is true, continued to move, but it moved more slowly and within limits: it was no Devonshire stream rushing and sparkling among rocks, but a quiet and rather dull river, flowing through tame pastures, and never gathering volume enough to break its invisible bounds.

To himself his powerlessness was sufficiently proved by his continued inability to grapple with the problem of Aubrey's identity. With a slow calm and a detachment very unlike his old self, he marshalled on one side and the other the few facts that lay within his

immediate reach; but though he resolved again and again to press for more decisive evidence, to thrash the question boldly out as he might have done that first morning upon the terrace, he found invariably, when the moment came, that he was no nearer to carrying out his resolution: he seemed rather to be further from it; more tongue-tied by a shyness which he could not understand. He was learning for the first time that delicacy is no late refinement, but one of the first and strongest instincts of the mind of man: poetry, religion, and love, his chief concerns, are the last upon which he can bring himself to speak freely, and perhaps the only ones he will never deal with in plain, square speech. For a bargain, a quarrel, a lie, he may possibly come to use direct statement and words of one syllable: but for the things which lie nearest to his beating heart there must be images and tropes, or an approach by zigzags, veiled and stealthy past the onlooker's comprehension, and to the last moment at the mercy of unreasonable panic.

For Stephen, in his present situation, plain speaking was doubly hard. He had failed to tell his story even to Ralph, who seemed upon the verge of guessing it unaided; how, then, could he ever succeed in forcing it upon so unprepared a listener as Aubrey? Yet the case was urgent; none the less so because he had no immediate limit of time before him; for since he was

apparently to spend his days for the present in close companionship with her, he must choose his direction and strike out for it, or he might be carried down by eddies and undercurrents, of which he knew nothing. There is, he dimly perceived, only one thing certain about the relations of any man and any woman, and that is that they will never remain the same for any length of time.

His escape from this difficulty came about in a manner which was unexpected but not unnatural, though it was long before the whole tangle was unravelled.

On the third morning after Edmund's departure, Sir Henry asked at breakfast how the day was to be spent.

"There is a little service to-day," said Lady Marland; "it is the Translation of King Edward. I shall go to church; I hope every one will go to church."

She looked at Stephen, who replied without enthusiasm that he would certainly come.

"It is also Midsummer Eve," said Aubrey to him. "How are you going to keep that?"

Stephen replied that he had never kept Midsummer Eve, and knew no way of doing so.

"What!" cried Aubrey. "Have you never looked for the way to Fairyland?"

He smiled a little bitterly. "I thought I had

found it once," he said, "but some one misled me, after all."

"Would you like to try again?" she asked, with bright eyes full of a childish playfulness. They made his heart ache, but there was no resisting them.

So these two started together towards the cool of the day, when the sun was westering, in a direction that was new to Stephen almost from the first.

They left the park by a stile below the lodge where he had come with Edmund to meet the Bishop, crossed the road where it passes through the hamlet of Lower Croonington, and found themselves at the entrance of the little valley through which the river Sel winds quietly between two high tablelands of green pasture. From the upper level the ground falls steeply to the water meadows, which lie one beyond another in the folds of the stream: on the further bank are orchards, a cottage or two, and an ancient mill; the space on the near side is narrower, and shut mysteriously in by a succession of high hedges and by the long, undulating line of alders which marks the river's course. In each great hedge, as it comes steeply down to the foot of the hill, there is a gate at the lowest and narrowest point; and when Stephen and Aubrey passed through these gates one after another, and saw before them each time a yet more remote and bowery meadow sleeping under the golden stillness of the evening, it was as though

they were retracing the path by which they had come so far from childhood, and wandering further moment by moment back into the land where people and facts are so small, and colours, songs, and fancies so abundant and so magically powerful.

"This is the end of Eden Vale," said Aubrey, as they came towards the last of the great hedges, beyond which the valley widens, and the steep pitch of the bank upon their left melted away into a long and gentle slope.

"And who named it Eden Vale?" asked Stephen, looking at her.

"Not I," she said, almost indignantly; "how could you think it?"

"It is a charming name," he said in self-defence, "and a right name."

"It would not be a right name," she replied, "if it were only an invention of mine."

"Forgive me," he said; "I have offended, but I do not know how."

She reddened, and was silent for a moment; then looked up again at him with clear, frank eyes that seemed determined to be understood.

"I love this country," she said; "I love it as I love nothing else in life. It is to me everything that men have ever loved—a mother, a nurse, a queen, a lover, and something greater and more sacred still. There is

not one look of it that I shall ever forget or cease to long for, and I would as soon kill a friend as change the name of the smallest of its fields."

Her voice quivered and rang in Stephen's memory: this was surely the music that for him could have no counterpart. But it was still beyond his power to speak of that.

"I understand," he said, "but I had almost forgotten that patriotism could be so intense and yet so local."

"If you forget that," she replied, "you forget all. Patriotism has its own high spiritual thoughts; but it has a body too—very earth of very earth, born of time and the land, and never to be found or made; it is as human as our other passions, instinctive and deep and unreasonable, and as hot as the blood by which we live."

Stephen remembered how the white cliffs had stirred his pulse against his own will.

"I have been long away," he said, "but I know you are right."

"You must come back to it," said Aubrey, in a more matter-of-fact tone. "You will have no difficulty there; it can no more be lost than acquired. But now," she continued, returning lightly to her old serious playfulness, "we have come to fairyland itself."

She pointed through the last gate, and he saw before

him a field unlike any of those through which they had yet come. It rose on the left very gradually to the far-receding crest of the hill, and in its upper part was studded with great oaks, now casting enormous shadows across the slope; but it was the lower stretch, where it ran level to the riverside, upon which Stephen and Aubrey were now entering, and it was this that gave the place its curious distinction. Here, as in the field before it, the deep green grass was thickly set with rushes, but in this place alone the rushes were of a pale and bluish tinge, and completely changed the colour of the field.

Aubrey stooped and gathered a handful of the fine smooth stems.

"Look," she said, handing them to Stephen: "slim and pointed every one; and you may come here when you will, at any time of the year, you will never find them different. When all other rushes are brown and thick with flower, these are always slender and blue-green, as you see them now: they are the true fairy rushes, of which the Little People make their lances, and their colour is so pale, because they sow them by moonlight instead of by day."

"On Midsummer Eve?" he asked.

"No," she replied gravely, as if to a child, "on Midsummer Eve we gather them, those of us who are wise; but every one must gather his own," she added,

taking back the bunch she had given to Stephen, and pointing to the ground before him.

He stooped obediently and picked an ample handful; they had to be taken one by one, and he had time for many thoughts as he gathered them. When he rose at last and looked up, he met the low rays of the setting sun. For a moment he was dazzled and closed his eyes; when he opened them again he found himself alone. He turned quickly and looked in every direction round the field; but it was empty, and now it seemed to be far wider and more lonely than he had thought. The great oaks were a long, long way up the hill, the elms in the hedge opposite stretched out enormous shadows towards him, the gate by which he had come he saw across an infinite space of misty gold: there was a dead hush everywhere, except in the alders by the stream, where a single robin sat eyeing him maliciously between the snatches of his restless and elfish little song.

The sensation of loneliness caught him suddenly, as the void seems to snatch a falling man: there was something unnatural in this sudden and utter solitude. He ran breathlessly to the gate; whether it was for himself or Aubrey that he feared he hardly knew, but certainly it was fear that drove him. When he saw her once more the fear ceased, but the mystery remained, for she was further off than he could have thought possible, and was even then disappearing through the

next gate on her homeward way along the valley. It was some time before he overtook her, and she seemed to greet him with the same air of malicious understanding as the elfin robin in the alder tree.

"How did I miss you?" he cried; "when did you leave me?"

"It is easy to see that you have been in fairyland," he said; "one is always alone there; and minutes seem like years, and years like minutes."

"There is certainly something uncanny about the place," he replied, "but it is very beautiful."

"'But' is the wrong word," she said. "Of course it is beautiful, and of course it is magical—haunted from ages beyond memory by the spirits of the earth. You will see to-night;" and she touched the rushes in his hand with those which she was carrying herself.

He looked at her with a smile, but met a face more inscrutable than ever; if he could read anything there, it was a touch of kindly scorn, a gentle tolerance of a blindness that could not last. So far as it was blindness to beauty it was cured, he felt, already; her love of the land he understood too; but there was something more, and all the way home he wondered, while they talked of other things, what it could be that this child knew and he did not.

XXXVI

STEPHEN slept that night, as he had promised to do, with the rushes beneath his pillow, and his dreams were long and vivid. He thought that he was newly come to Gardenleigh, a boy eager for boyish delights, such as he had enjoyed there more than once before, but disappointed and miserable to find himself alone. Sir Henry he could see, and Lady Marland, but they were grave and sad, and seemed to be unaware of his presence; his own companions were gone, and he felt that he could not rest until he had found them. He looked for them everywhere, and though he could not overtake them, he seemed to be everywhere close upon their track—in the garden, on the down, by the lake, and in the avenue he seemed to know that they had been before him by only a few minutes, and he followed them with a breathless and strangely anxious expectation through woods and valleys that he seemed to have long forgotten and now saw again with mingled recognition and surprise. He came at last towards home, and saw the church lying below him; it was the only place he had not searched, and he knew at once that they must be there. But as he stood at the door and raised the

latch, a new and terrible sensation gripped him round the heart; he felt that he was going into the presence of something that he had never yet known, and from which he could never again be free. Opposite to him as he entered he saw the archway of the Marland chantry; it was hung with a curtain of black. He lifted this and looked within; on the floor lay two crosses of wild flowers, freshly gathered, covering a space where the pavement had been taken up, and the gap closed for the time with white wood planks. At the foot of these stood Edmund and another boy, whom Stephen knew at once for Harry Marland; they were looking down at a child of six who lay sleeping on the floor. Her long hair was tumbled among the cowslips on the grave; one hand was thrown up round her head and grasped a little bunch of wild pansies; with the other she had rubbed tears from her face, and marked her cheek with a faint earthy stain.

Once more Stephen seemed to be remembering something that he had unaccountably forgotten; side by side beneath these flowers were lying Will and Johnny Marland, companions of his own boyhood, lost a month ago beneath the waters of the lake. Their faces came before him suddenly in a hundred little scenes, and he felt himself start forward as if it might even now be not too late to save them from the moment that had taken them for ever.

Then he thought the other two turned and saw him; they said nothing, but Harry pointed to the sleeping child. Stephen wondered who she was, and why she seemed so still; a fear came upon him that she too might be dead, and he stooped quickly and laid his hand upon her little bare wrist. She woke and sat up, staring at the two boys opposite. Edmund held out his hands to her, but she turned quickly and flung herself sobbing into Stephen's arms. He carried her out through the black-hung archway, and sat down under the west wall of the church; he felt her tears wet upon his own cheek, and her breath coming in warm floods under the soft curtain of her hair, till the sobbing died away again by longer and longer intervals into the regular breathing of sleep.

It seemed to him that he sat there for a long time motionless; his arms ached a little at first, then stiffened and lost the feeling of their burden. A stream of low, sad music came down from the chancel, and he forgot himself in thought. When the music ceased, he heard the long burr of the organ, and the sound of the key-board closing. He rose to go, and found that his arms were empty. At the door stood Edmund and Harry, waiting for him. "Where is Aubrey?" they asked; and in a sudden panic terror he turned back, and woke. But the child's face was still clearly before him, and he felt still the warm glow of a deep and immemorial affection.

XXXVII

THAT face was still before Stephen when he threw back the curtain from his window, and his dreams, instead of fading away among the bright colours of the day, grew every moment more vivid as he recalled them, until they fixed themselves in his mind rather as newly recovered memories than as the transient and bloodless imaginations of sleep. Whether or not these scenes were indeed part, in some way, of his own history in the past, they belonged to Aubrey's recollection of him, they had been called up by her, they were a key, he told himself, by which he could at last unlock her secret. He came to meet her with a light heart, and suffered a quick and unaccountable disappointment. She gave him a cold and passive hand; her eyes were not for him at all. Throughout breakfast she spoke only to Lady Marland, or to Sir Henry, when he addressed her directly; and by the time the meal was over, Stephen's mood had passed from bewilderment into despair, and from despair into an indignant resolution to insist upon knowing the worst immediately.

He found her alone at last, bending over her embroidery, in a cool and darkened room. Lady Marland's

work and work-basket lay on the table near, and her return seemed only too probable; but Stephen could not wait. He took the empty chair at Aubrey's side, and sat down close by her; then, as she made no sign, he summoned all his courage, and touched her hand with the two or three rushes which he was carrying.

"You have not asked me about my dreams," he said, with a manner intended to be light and disarming; but in his own ears his voice seemed to croak.

"Dreams?" she replied, looking straight at him, and then straight away at her work. "Are you still thinking of dreams?"

"When should one think of dreams," he asked, "if not on Midsummer Eve and the morning after?"

"Oh! on Midsummer Eve," she said rather disdainfully. "Yes, one may be childish at such times; but the morning after!"

"Do you know," he replied, "that what you said appears to me less childish this morning than it did last night?"

She lifted her eyebrows in silence, and prepared to thread her needle with a fresh piece of silk.

"Is it possible," he cried, "that your magic works so unfailingly upon others and leaves yourself untouched? Or did you forget your rushes?"

Her hand shook; she laid down the silken thread and began hastily to search for another.

"Come," she said, with surprising suddenness; "if you really think your dreams so interesting, let me hear them; but you must not expect me to take any responsibility for them."

"But I do," he replied, more seriously; "and I thank you for them; they gave me back many treasures that I did not know I had ever possessed."

He told the whole story, with every smallest and most vivid detail, but with more and more difficulty towards the end. When he had to tell of the sobbing child asleep upon his shoulder, the words came in toneless jerks, which enraged him by their inappropriate ugliness. When he had finished, he felt that no action could be too violent or hazardous, if only it would carry him out of his embarrassment.

Her voice came upon his discomfort like a cool, firm hand upon fevered eyes.

"I am glad you had that dream," she said very quietly, speaking almost to herself, "because it is all true, and you had forgotten; but I wonder whether you would have believed it if there had been no one to tell you it was true."

"I believed it instantly," he replied, puzzled by her quiet earnestness.

"Do you mean," she persisted, "that it is possible to know when one has dreamed of real things and when not?"

"Sometimes, certainly; I knew at once."

"But how did you know? What told you?"

"My heart," he answered, in a voice that was no more than a hoarse whisper; and he felt the blood beating round his temples like the full race against a heavy mill-wheel.

Aubrey seemed unconscious of his agitation; she was intently following out her own question; but the current of her thought was tinged by his last words, and dyed her cheeks slowly as it passed along. Stephen saw the change, and felt himself upon the brink of a great discovery. He leaned towards her, and his voice became again almost a whisper, from his very eagerness to be heard and answered.

"Aubrey," he murmured, "have *you* no dreams to tell?"

But now that the moment had come she was ready and unperturbed. Across the frame of her embroidery, lifted quietly from her knees, she looked at him with eyes that were unsubdued, and met his summons with a demand of their own.

"Listen," she said: "but you must promise to deal fairly, whatever it may cost."

He hesitated, casting about for her meaning.

"You have told me," she went on, "of old times and places where I have been with you, long ago; they were dreams, and I have made them real for you."

He nodded, anxious for the sequel, and already half guessing it.

"It was not much to own to, but it would have been easier to let it pass and fade. If I too have dreamed truth and you know it, you must own it in your turn."

"I will," he replied eagerly; "why should I not?"

"Wait," she said; "it may not be so easy as you think."

She was silent a moment, looking at him, he thought, as if from a great distance, and with the kindness of pity or regret.

"What I dreamed," she began at last, "was something like this. I thought that I was here at Gardenleigh, seeing and hearing everything that passed, but neither seen nor heard myself. There was great rejoicing in the house, and a wedding was to take place that day. I saw the bride, already dressed, come into the hall and throw her arms about an old man who was waiting for her there with a crowd of other people. He kissed her again and again, and they went out together towards the church. Then I saw the bridegroom coming alone down the hill from the garden; he was in a white-and-gold cloak, and I saw his face clearly and knew it well. But as he came down the path I saw another figure starting from the edge of the avenue, from the place where I have so often sat; it

came straight across the grass, and I saw that it would intercept the bridegroom halfway down the path. There was something terrible about this figure; it moved so quickly, and passed over the sea of tall grass and buttercups without stirring or trampling them. It came to the bridegroom without stopping, and pushed him lightly from the path; he fell quietly into the long grass, and I saw that he was dead. The figure stooped over him, and took his wedding-cloak and put it on; and now I saw that it was wearing a mask, and the mask was made like the bridegroom's face. Then the figure came down to the church and went in, and I saw with astonishment that every one took it for the bridegroom himself. I spoke to those near me, but they did not answer; the service had begun. I became more and more terrified; I cried aloud, 'He is a murderer: tear off his mask!' but no one seemed to hear. I struggled towards the bride, to warn her before it was too late; she at least would see the imposture. But when I stood beside her I could not speak; I was struck dumb with horror to see how marvellously like the mask was to the man. Then I saw them go out of the church, but at the door the false bridegroom turned away from the house and led the way to the garden path. The bride would have stayed him, but she could not: she wept bitterly, and stretched out her hand to the old man; but no one moved to help her,

and those two went very swiftly up the path and disappeared into the avenue. Then every one began to follow; but when they had gone halfway they stopped, for there in the grass lay the true bridegroom dead. They led the old man up to the place, and I saw the despair in his eyes. He said, 'She is lost; I shall never see her again.' I heard myself crying fiercely, 'You shall! you shall!' but he could not hear me, and I felt myself being carried away irresistibly to an infinite distance, where I could no longer see or hear either the place or the people of my dream."

When she paused Stephen was silent for a moment, for she had told the story with the power of unforgotten horror, and he needed time to recover from the impression it had made upon his imagination.

"Well?" she demanded at last, with a sharp ring in her voice that was almost peremptory. "What do you say?—true or untrue?"

"It is untrue," he replied. "I have supplanted no one."

"You wear the mask," she retorted.

"And the cloak?" he asked boldly. "If I do, it is my own."

"The mask," she repeated—"the mask: you cannot say that you are what you seem. Where is the country from which you came, and to which you will return?"

Her voice faltered from its firm questioning to a wistful and uncertain tone.

"Aubrey," he said, looking into her eyes, "was that truly your dream? and were there none but that?"

She crimsoned slowly, as if with the reflection of an unseen light; her work slipped down, and one hand fell with it by her side.

"Yes, there were more; but they are all summed up in that. They were all of parting from the old loves and going away into the dark."

"The dark!" he said. "You are no coward; and life is always the unknown."

"Ah! things and places," she sighed. "I should not fear them, I think; it is only persons that are strange and terrible."

"You are afraid of me?"

The tenderness in his voice shook her; she spoke hurriedly.

"I was afraid: how could I not be afraid? I had seen another Stephen, in another life."

Joy sprang in him like dawn, and the future flushed upward from the horizon.

"Not another," he cried exultingly—"not another! There is only one, and that one yours."

He took her hand in both his own and bent to kiss it. She drew it gently away and rose to her feet.

"No, no; that cannot be. Your place is there,

where I saw you, in the age to come, where I can only go in dreams; mine is here in the past, that is only a dream to you."

"Aubrey," he said, "I will never give you up. I do not care whether it is here or there, but you and I must be together now."

She shook her head, looking at him with wide, sad eyes.

"A man's life is where his work is; you can never be content with this."

"Then come," he said, holding out his hands.

She pointed at them with her own. "You confess it," she said despairingly, "and you ask what is impossible."

The door opened, and Lady Marland came in, chattering like a sparrow.

XXXVIII

"IMPOSSIBLE" is a word that the lover has always had to face, but he has given it a meaning of his own. It claims to be final; yet to him it brings not the dull sound of the cold, eternal rock against which hands of flesh beat vainly, but merely the flat defiance of a closing door—a door, like all doors, made to be opened, either from without or within. If not to-day, then perhaps to-night; and if to-night too he finds it barred, there may be possibly a light behind the chinks, or a voice for the listener, waiting intently in silence. To-morrow, at any rate, the house will be his own.

To-morrow seemed to Stephen to be a long way off, but there was much that helped him to pass the time of waiting. He spent long days with Aubrey, and long days by himself; sometimes riding through the greenest and most peaceful country that the world contains, sometimes floating on still water in which the deep tranquillity of summer seemed to repeat itself in a yet deeper mystery of peace, at once more fragile and more unsubstantial. The distant unrealities of everyday life passed over him like the drift of light clouds that chequer the sky with only momentary changes.

Visitors and travellers came and went, and neighbours now and then, as the weather cooled and lightened towards autumn. There was often news to talk of—news of the King in Scotland, of the Duke in Normandy, of the Prince upon his new campaign; news, too, of the Bishop and his health, but not a word of Ralph from any one.

Mid-September brought a wilder and more melancholy note; for several days the rain fell hour after hour from twilight to twilight, and the wind went straining and sighing among the great trees with a sound like the breathing of a strong man tossed in the long, unconscious agony of death. Vague rumours came of a disaster in France: Sir Henry would not hear a word of them, but he was unusually bitter when he spoke of the inveterate folly of marching with too small a force, and risking everything upon a single hazard. The others would have covered up so anxious a topic. Stephen, though he could remember little enough of the Black Prince, argued determinedly that his force was a match for any odds, for he knew by experience that even defeat may well be less terrible than the nightmare of dumb endurance that crushes men separately when their pride will not allow them to talk openly of their fears. He thought that Aubrey looked hard at him while he was speaking, but she would not be drawn into the conversation, or own to

any definite opinion on the war; whatever unacknowledged memories she might share with him, she was still, to all appearance, the child of another century than that from which he had come.

The sky cleared at last, the gale dropped, and the nightmare faded away before the returning sun. There were fallen trees to be trimmed and lopped and sawn, and carted to the timber-yard—a week's work at least, and a great grief to Aubrey, who loved the dead giants as if they had been human. For her they all had characters and voices of their own, and it was a lucky moment that inspired Stephen to speak of them as her "fellow-countrymen." She joined in the laugh at herself, but laid the saying away in a secret place among others much more serious; and went out with him to see the woodmen at their work. The park echoed with the crash of timber and the ringing strokes of the axe; the great teams stood patiently by, waiting motionless, until the huge trunk was stripped and fettered for its last journey. Then the whip cracked, and the word of command from a gruff Saxon throat set the shaggy horses thudding ponderously on the turf; the head-bells rang, and the bright brass on the martingales flashed in the sun; the vast baulk started, stuck, started again, and glided at last from the rollers to the waggon with a heart-shaking rattle. Then once more the chains were shifted and made fast, and the

horses went on their way with a slow, majestic step worthy of a great king's obsequies.

"Ah!" cried Aubrey, with shining eyes, "how I love the earth! She builds trees where we can only build houses."

"Houses can be English too," said Stephen, half laughing at her.

"They can; but they change. Yesterday they were of wood, to-day they are of stone, to-morrow they may be of something else; there is no finality in houses. But trees are always trees, and what we have been looking at is a picture that might belong to any generation since England was England."

"And while England is England, I think."

To this, however, he got no reply, and he began to realize that, from some feeling at which he could only guess, the future was a subject on which she did not wish to talk with him. But, except for this one limitation, their companionship became even closer than before.

And now, to Stephen's wonder and content, this quiet valley that he had watched all through its summer dream passed on into a still profounder calm, the bright reverie of the year in its riper and serener age. Morning after morning broke under the light October mist, that left as it dissolved a delicate silver tissue glimmering and sparkling on the grassy slopes.

All day the windless air became softer and more mellow; roses bloomed again for the last time, and great red admirals sailed in fleets among the autumn purples. The woods glowed as if every sunset dyed them deeper; single trees hung in the landscape like towering golden clouds. The distant Selwood chimes, as they floated over the old red-walled garden where he sat one afternoon with Aubrey, seemed to be an inseparable part of the enchantment, the very voice of immemorial beauty.

To her they brought a widely different message: she sprang up white and trembling.

"The bells!" she cried; "the bells on Friday! Stephen, it is victory!"

She caught her breath and listened again: two bright tears gathered in her eyes, till she shook them down with a laugh and turned to Stephen.

"Let us go down and send for news," she said; and they hurried to the gate.

As they came out of the shelter of the high wall on to the hill, the sound of the chimes came still more clearly, and changed to a shooting peal that seemed to crash with reckless joy. It echoed in Stephen's heart, but Aubrey it seemed to possess like an inspiration; she walked beside him with such an ecstasy of silent pride as he had never seen or imagined. As they neared the house there was a sound of trampling and

loud shouting of many voices; two men were striding quickly from the stables to the courtyard. Aubrey's voice rang out like a silver trumpet; the two figures turned, and one stepped back a pace to look between the trees. "Harry!" she cried again, and ran on to fling her arms about his neck. When Stephen came up he found them all three laughing and talking at once. "Here he is, Stephen!" she said, leaning fondly on her cousin's arm; "and I think you used to know Lord Bryan."

XXXIX

THAT was a festal night. Stephen was astonished at the fervour and universality of the rejoicing; he hardly recognized his staid and tongue-tied fellow-countrymen. But there was in reality little cause for his surprise. No such news as this had come from oversea since the great days of '46, and even the memory of Cressy had long suffered eclipse beneath the black shadow of the pestilence. But now for an hour the age was young again, the nation one triumphant fellowship, the cost and strain of war forgiven, the Crown re-jewelled by that Prince who was at once the friend of the Commons and the flower of the world's chivalry. No wonder that the hills of England shouted together, as of old, with tongues of fire; no wonder that here at Gardenleigh, as in a hundred other valleys, the old hall was crowded and gay that night with a revelry it had long forgotten.

At the high table Lady Marland and Sir Henry sat between the messengers of victory; Harry Marland by his father, and Lord Bryan on his hostess's right; Aubrey next, and Stephen by her; two of the five squires below them; the rest at the other end with

the Rector, tall John Perrot, a saint with a soldier's eye, who knew when feasting on a Friday was legitimate—his turn would come to-morrow. The lower tables were filled to overflowing by Lord Bryan's men, quartered for the most part in Selwood, but for the evening safer here among the well-disciplined household of the Marlands, than running loose through the pothouses of the town. They were glad to be back, doubly glad to find themselves so far on their way westward; and since they were all Devon men, with a becoming confidence, the sound of their speech came up the hall as pleasant and as free as the wind over the heather. At Sir Henry's bidding they drank to the King, the Queen, and the Royal Family, with enthusiasm; and to the Prince with a roar that seemed intended to be heard across the Channel. Then the high table rose, and left them to it.

In the great gallery wine and spices were waiting on two tables by the fire. The room was ablaze with light from end to end, and hung along the walls with fresh leafage of all the richest colours of autumn. Where the armoured figures stood in their grim, unbending rank there was a wreath on every helmet, and the nearest mailed hand gripped the tarnished and moth-eaten banner of Harry's grandfather, the first Sir Henry, crowned with oak-leaves, and wound about the staff with bright new scarlet and silver. The fire,

piled high with logs, gave out a clear and steady glow, that flashed on the silver cups and flagons, and was reflected again in the polished surface of the tables on which they stood.

The soldiers all exclaimed with admiration as they entered the room; it was many months since they had seen such comfort, and here there was an added touch of stateliness, the more impressive because it told, not of effort or ostentation, but of ancestral wealth and the unconscious ease of a country long untouched by the havoc of war.

"That was a gay scene downstairs," said Lord Bryan, as he handed Lady Marland to the high-backed chair by the fireside.

"Was it not terrible?" she replied, in her shrill little voice. "It was all I could do to hear myself speak."

"I heard you quite well, my dear," said her husband gravely, with a gleam behind the gravity.

Among the younger squires there was some danger of a lapse from decorum; but it passed off, fortunately, without attracting Lady Marland's attention.

"I did my best," she replied, with plaintive dignity, "but I am sure I have strained my throat."

Aubrey settled herself at her aunt's feet. "Never mind, dearest," she said; "we need not do any more talking now. Guy is going to tell us all about the battle."

Lord Bryan smiled and poured out wine. "All about this battle is a long story," he said, "and more than I really know. Harry saw it from beginning to end better than I did; if he will be chronicler, I will do my best to help him out here and there."

"Well," said Harry, cheerfully, "where am I to begin? You know we started on the ninth of August, and drew covert after covert for more than a month before we found anything like a warrantable deer. I can't go through all that now—it would take much too long. It ended at last in our coming on the whole herd at once—they were seven or eight times as many as we were—and we got them safely harboured in Poitiers on a Saturday night. We slept out ourselves, in a wood by the abbey of Nouaillé, and began to lay the pack on first thing in the morning. They were tired of all this casting about, and just mad for a kill. But we had all forgotten what a wily quarry we were after. At the very moment when we thought he was going to show sport, what should we see but a great Cardinal—one of these professional arbitration-mongers—trotting towards us, as calmly as if he had been coming to pay a friendly call. He talked a great deal about the wickedness of shedding Christian blood, and wasted the whole day for us by running backwards and forwards between the two lines, carrying the most impossible proposals from one to the other. It was rather too bad,

considering that the skirmishing had already begun before he started, and our men and theirs had watered their horses at the same stream that morning, and promised each other any amount of broken heads. But the Frenchmen did not fool the Prince as completely as they thought; they got up a lot of reinforcements during the day, and our fellows grumbled a good deal as they saw the banners coming in; but we had a good rest and did some useful scouting. In the evening the negotiations were broken off, as every one knew they would be, and we moved away a little to avoid any chance of a surprise. They were fifty thousand odd—eighty-seven banners—and we were a bare seven thousand: in a night attack they would have gone right over us, like a harrow over a toad.

"At breakfast-time next morning—would you believe it?—there was the Cardinal again. We really rather admired the fellow's obstinacy; but we had no idea of losing another good day, so this time we sent him off home at once, with a cheer to show that there was no ill-feeling. You ought to be pleased with us for that, mother."

"My dear," replied Lady Marland, "I am always pleased when you behave properly to the clergy. I have no doubt the Cardinal is a very good man."

"Oh! is he?" said Harry, with a nod to his father. "I will come to that a little later on. I want you now

to understand exactly the position we were in. For a straight fight according to the rules we were not so badly off as the figures would appear to show: we had four thousand men-of-arms to their eight; the rest of their big battalions were sure to be very unsteady, and they had practically no marksmen to set against our archers—two thousand archers we had. On a fairly narrow front, with no open flanks, we might very well hold our own if we could only manage to get our huge baggage-train into leaguer. Now, just across the river, which lay on our right, the Prince had marked a piece of ground that was almost exactly what we wanted: a big field, or rather an enclosed hill, with a good hedge and ditch all round it; and what was better still, that part of the hedge which was to be our front ran down on the left into a piece of marshy ground by the river, which was practically impossible for cavalry. Some of the enemy were supposed to be already down under the front of the hill, but the higher part that we were to occupy first had a lot of bushes and brambles on it that would give us good cover; and besides, we should have the advantage of the ground. The top of this hill was rough pasture; on the south and west face there were vines, where we meant to clamber up, and the remainder of the field—that is, the whole of the north and eastern slope down to the hedge—was stubble and green crops, and so was the ground beyond, on the French side of the fence.

"The first thing to do was to get across the river, which lies very awkwardly in a deep bed. There was a ford, happily, just narrow enough to be practicable, and over we went in a scramble—Warwick first with the van, then the Prince's division with the waggons. Salisbury had the rearguard, and he came flying over and got into position on Warwick's right rear before our division had half finished leaguering in the marsh; but some of us—the men-of-arms—had gone on up to the top of the hill with the Prince himself. There he kept us, in reserve, as it turned out; and that is how I came to see the whole show so well."

"Where were you, Guy?" asked Aubrey.

"In the same place," Lord Bryan replied; "but I was in the first line of the reserve, which was used up much earlier. It was the last four hundred—Harry and his friends—that really did the business."

"Don't listen to him," said Harry. "I'm telling you the whole thing just as it happened, and you must attend to me. What I want you to see is this: Warwick, with fifteen hundred men-of-arms, lining out behind the hedge on the slope where it began to run down into the marsh, in touch with our fellows in leaguer at the bottom. On his flanks he had a thousand archers; they stood mostly outside the hedge, on the bank above the ditch, but some were in among the vines, and those lowest down were right in the marsh.

Down on the more level ground in front, where it was dry enough, Warwick's young bloods were trying to get up a little tournament with some of the French cavalry, who were beginning to advance in two lots, under the Marshals Clermont and Audreham. By the way, they had been quarrelling, those two, and they came on too quick, without waiting for their supports. It appears that when the Prince began to cross, and his banner was moved about and finally went out of sight in the dip, one of them said we were evidently retreating, and the other sneered at him; so they raced each other into action and spoiled the timing of the whole attack. While Clermont was skirmishing, Audreham halted a moment to watch. Clermont seized the opportunity to make a dash for a big gap in the fence, some way up beyond Warwick's right. It was a good move, because if he had got in he would have taken the whole first division in flank. But he reckoned without Salisbury, whom he probably could not see. When he reached the part of the hedge where the gap was—it was a really big gap, a cart-track wide enough for four horses abreast—he found Salisbury there already; he had moved forward on his own account, and had his archers very neatly drawn up in open order, with a second rank closing the intervals, and his men-of-arms in line behind them. So the rearguard, to their huge delight, were in action first, after all."

"In fact," said Sir Henry, "they had given themselves leave not to be a rearguard at all. What did the Prince say to that?"

"Well, he saw that Salisbury had really no choice in the circumstances; but, of course, he looked black, because it just doubled his fighting line and halved his reinforcements. What he did was to make his own division into two reserves, as Guy has told you. Even so, if we had had to meet four successive attacks, as the French intended, we might have been done; but, happily, Orléans never toed the line at all, and we just lasted out."

"Now come back to the marshals," said Sir Henry.

"The marshals got to close quarters in much better order than we liked; the shooting of Warwick's men straight in their faces seemed to produce very little effect upon them; so the Prince sent Oxford down in a hurry to advance the archers on the left. By George! you never saw such a change in five minutes; those fellows ran out without any cover, and smote the French cavalry on their right flank and rear with a perfect hailstorm. Some of the horses looked like hedgehogs; all of them went down or bolted, and Warwick did what he liked with the few who had got through the hedge. Then the archers came back to their place in regular marching order, as cool and quiet as if they had been out to the butts. Meanwhile, Salisbury had done

equally well on the right; so there was an end of the marshals and their quarrel—Clermont was dead and Audreham a prisoner.

"Nothing in the way of pursuit was allowed: Normandy's division was already advancing; they were too late to support, so they made a separate attack of it. There were a great lot of them, and they had a good stiffening of men-of-arms, but fortunately no artillery. Still, it looked like a long and tough business, and the Prince sent down the larger half of his reserve into the fighting line to enable Warwick to extend towards Salisbury. This time the archers seemed to be out of it: there were no horses for them to stick, and they used up all their arrows on steel plates that were too good for them. It was a ding-dong fight; our fellows had begun by standing outside the hedge this time—I suppose they wanted to get their backs up against something—but the Frenchmen pushed them home again with an ugly rush, and began to follow through the fence. Then some archers of our division, including Guy's little lot of Devon men, who had finished their work down among the baggage, came at a grand run right up the waggon side of the hill and over the top and down on to the thick of the mellay outside the hedge. There they stood and shot at point-blank range, and that soon settled the business. Then came the greatest stroke of luck we had. When our fellows had

once shifted the French, they kept them moving so briskly that they ran them right into Orléans' men behind, and the greater part of both divisions went off the field together towards Chauvigny. Those of them who did not bolt went back and joined the King's own division. They must have been good men to come again after such a shaking, but they got nothing by it; it was not their day."

"Oh! don't say that," said Aubrey, gently; "it was their best day."

"It was certainly their last," replied Harry, with satisfaction.

"My boy," said his father, "you have every right to triumph, but what were you feeling like yourselves about that time?"

Harry reddened. "I did not mean to be brutal," he said; "and we certainly were not thinking lightly of them just then. Our front was a dreadful sight; the wounded were being dragged hastily under cover, and there were not half enough men to do the work properly, for we had hardly a man left standing in the line who was not either wounded himself or dead beat with fatigue; and then there was such a shortage of arrows that the archers were all over the field collecting what they could—even pulling them out of dying men, I heard; it was no time for squeamishness. Mercifully, the French King was so long in getting under way that

things were straightened out at last, and the men got their breath a little; but there was no doubt that they did not like the look of the weather, and some of them raised a scare that the Captal de Buch had gone home. He had certainly disappeared, with all his command—fifty or sixty men-of-arms and a good hundred archers—but he was the last man in the world to go before the end, and he proved it once for all. While we were refitting, he was marching back clean round the hill we were on, and out to the right, so as to fall on the left rear of the French when the pinch came. Meanwhile, the Prince ordered us down at last—the only four hundred fresh men he had—got the whole line out into the open, with us in the centre, and called out to Walter Woodland to 'advance banner.' Then the French made their final mistake. When they saw us on the move, with the lilies and lions overhead and all our trumpets sounding the charge, they started right off toward us at the double, as if they meant to roll over us like a huge wave. Of course, when they got up they were in rather ragged order, and quite blown. Still, the shock was tremendous, and our line reeled from one end to the other. But the Prince was not going to lose his best fight, if hard hitting would save it. We could see the Captal by this time; he was flying a big St. George's ensign to warn us not to mistake him, and quite right too, for he came absolutely straight in upon the French

rear, in the very track they had just trampled. Then the Prince knew he had them between the crackers; they were a big nut and a hard one, but he kept shouting to us, 'Forward! forward!' and laying on himself like ten men threshing, till he got the rush to a standstill, and we felt that we were holding them. At that moment, in the nick of time, the Captal's archers began to let fly; ours had already spent their shot, and were joining in with swords and sticks and anything else they could pick up—even stones. But those hundred fellows had every one of them a full quiver and a fair target—ten thousand backs at thirty yards. There were more than twenty companies in that division. Well, they were hopelessly clubbed almost before we knew what was happening; but we soon saw that they were hurting each other more than us, and when the banners began dropping one by one we knew that we really had them at last. It was more like reaping than fighting; they were standing so thick that they could not hit out at us, and we cut them down in swathes all along the line, while the Prince and Chandos and Cobham went deeper and deeper in, trying to reach the King himself. He was easy to see, because he was down below us and on a bit of a mound, and had Chargny by him with his banner; but to get near him was a very different matter, because of the mob of hungry fellows who wanted him alive for his ransom. He kept them off with quick,

dangerous strokes, just like a stag at bay, and whenever any of them tried to get at him from one side or the other, his young son Philip called out, 'Right, father! left! right!' At last Chargny went down with the banner in his hands, and the King saw that it was time to cry 'Enough!' After all, he had done uncommonly well; it is not often that a King gets such a taste of the real thing, and if his men had all put as much good-will into it as he did, we should probably not be here now."

"Who took him in the end?" asked the Rector.

"Oh! a Gascon, of course," replied Harry, with a short laugh.

"And how much did he get for him?"

"No one knows exactly. You see, a dozen fellows claimed the prize, and the Prince said he would hear all their claims when he got home; but the King had given this Morbecque his glove and asked his name. So it was really a clear case, and Morbecque, when we came away, had already been promoted and had an enormous sum given him on account, to keep up his position—the position of a Gascon adventurer!"

Lord Bryan laughed. "Cheer up, Harry!" he said. "You and I ought to be thankful we don't need the money, for after all, he was forty yards in front of us."

"Besides," said Aubrey, "I dare say it was less humiliating for the King to surrender to a Frenchman."

Lord Bryan ceased to smile. "I assure you," he said, in a quiet tone that seemed to change the whole key of the conversation, "that if he thought so, he was never more mistaken. No matter who took his glove, it was to Edward Prince of Wales that he surrendered."

There was no pride in the voice, but so much in the words that every one was silent.

"Let me tell you," he continued, "what happened the first evening. When supper was ready, the Prince brought the King into his tent and placed him at a high table with Prince Philip and seven others of the highest degree among those we had taken unhurt. The rest of the prisoners of rank were arranged at other tables, with Chandos and Cobham and many more of our own people among them. Everything was done so well and with so much ceremony that it was more like supping in the pavilion after a tournament at Windsor, than in a tent hastily pitched on the field of battle. At the high table an English knight stood behind the chair of every guest, and when the French King had taken his seat two trumpeters sounded for the service to begin. The King looked about him in surprise, and asked where his host was to sit. When no one answered he turned round; the Prince was there beside him on one knee, offering him water for his hands in a silver basin."

The words fell deliberately one by one from the speaker, as if he knew that he had no need to repeat

a single stroke; he had drawn the picture as he intended, and it must convince.

"What did the King say then?" asked Aubrey, eagerly.

"I could not hear, but I saw that he was remonstrating, and the Sire de Bourbon rose from his seat on the King's left to give up his place to the Prince. But the Prince remained kneeling, and there was a sudden hush all through the tent, so that we could hear every word that followed. The Prince said that he was not worthy to sit at the table with so great a King. The King replied, with a bitter little smile, that the day's work was a sufficient answer to that. But the Prince said very earnestly, 'Sir, I beg you will not take it so hard that the fortune of war has gone against you. Let me assure you that you will meet with so much honour and kindness at my father's hands that you will remember to-day only as the beginning of your friendship with him.' That was enough; I saw the King's face change. He looked straight at the Prince for one moment, then dipped both his hands in the bowl without another word.

"After that, every one's tongue was loosed again, and even the French were loud in the Prince's praise. The one who was sitting next me—he was a very fine courtly old gentleman—seemed to be much moved; he said to me, 'Sir, your Prince is like to prove a great

King;' to which I replied, 'Yes, if God send him life and a continuance of such good fortune.' He turned quickly away, and to my great surprise I saw that he was in tears. Presently he recovered himself, and said, 'You do well not to make too sure; I made too sure.' His own son was a very promising young captain, of much about the Prince's age, and he had been killed with Clermont in the morning."

"Poor fellow!" said Sir Henry, in a low voice, and he went on murmuring to himself in a tone of deep feeling, "Poor fellow; poor fellow!"

Every one knew that he was thinking of his own lost boys, but no one knew what to say; there was a moment of embarrassed silence, and then the squires rose to bid their hostess good night. They had to get the archers away to their quarters before it was too late; the Rector took his leave at the same time, and when they had gone Lady Marland went downstairs herself to recall her household to discipline, and give her orders for the morning. Aubrey she left behind to look after Sir Henry: besides, while anything remained to be told of the victory, it would have been impossible to tear her away from the hearing of it.

XL

The five who remained re-grouped themselves more closely round the hearth. Aubrey moved Lord Bryan into the seat her aunt had just left, and took his place by Sir Henry, who was still musing with his eyebrows lifted wearily, and his eyes cast down upon the floor. Stephen sat on his other side, and Harry stood in front of the fire cracking walnuts, with the air of one who is biding his time. He was silent during the moment or two of coming and going at the door; when it had finally closed behind Lady Marland and the Rector, he looked up and said to his father—

"Now that the clerical party have left us, perhaps you would like to hear the rest of that good man the Cardinal."

"Eh?" said Sir Henry, rousing himself. "What was that, Harry? I forget."

"It was nothing very much, but it pleased some of us a good deal. I told you how the Cardinal of Perigord wasted a whole day of our time in expounding to us the doctrine of the Church on the wickedness of war, and rebuking us for wanting to fight. Well, after all that, and after posing as the impartial friend

of both sides, what do you suppose the old red fox did? He went off to Poitiers himself, as sorrowful and as sanctimonious as you please, but he left all his own people, except his chaplains and secretary, to do their best against us, fighting in the King's division. Half of them were under his own nephew, Sir Robert de Duras, and the rest with his underling, the Castellan of Amposta. When the final smash came, the Castellan was one of the first prisoners brought in. The Prince was naturally furious to see him there, and ordered him to be beheaded on the spot. While they were hunting for the provost-marshal and a log, the wretched Castellan tried to beg off. 'No no!' the Prince said. 'People employed by the Church, who come and go in treaty for peace, ought not in reason to bear arms or to fight on either side; and if they do, they must pay forfeit like any other felons.' But then Chandos reminded him that he would have plenty of time later, and just now there were many other things of more importance to think of. So he went on, and left the Castellan, for he never can say 'no' to Chandos; but they had not gone a hundred yards further when they came on Sir Robert de Duras himself lying dead under some trees. The fellow had even had the bare-faced impudence to take his banner into action, and there it was lying by him with a dozen of his men, all as dead as their master.

'Here, at any rate, is something for the Cardinal,' says the Prince, grimly. 'There is nothing to wait for this time, I think, Chandos;' and he made them take up Duras's body just as it was, and carry it into Poitiers to the Cardinal on a shield, with this message: 'The Prince of Wales's thanks to the Cardinal of Perigord for his courteous and Christian endeavours, and he salutes him by this token.'"

There was a moment's silence: the hearers were evidently all impressed by the story, but no two of them in quite the same way.

"Well, father," said Harry, presently, "what do you think of that?"

Sir Henry answered one half the question only. "There can be no doubt," he said, "that the Churchmen were entirely in the wrong."

"Yes," said Aubrey, "the Prince was right there; but I cannot help wishing he had not sent that message. It seems to me somehow to be inconsistent with his behaviour to the King—that was splendid."

"Oh!" replied Harry, in a tone of disappointment and remonstrance. "If you are going to talk of consistency, we are all inconsistent at times; and the Prince, after all, is a man like the rest of us."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Stephen, "because from what I have heard he seems to be even more interesting as a character than as a commander;

and I have been wondering whether I might ask some questions about him without offence."

"Ask away," replied Harry, with unmeasured confidence. "If you get one shot home, I'll say you've a keen eye."

Lord Bryan, who had been listening to the conversation in silence, with his eyes fixed upon the red glow of the crumbling logs, now turned slowly in his big chair, so as to face the speakers. Stephen saw the movement, and was embarrassed by it; but it was not in his nature to shrink from any argument against any odds. Besides, he had been longing all evening for an opportunity to talk with this distinguished soldier and diplomatist, who at thirty-seven had already fought in three great wars, held two governorships, and kept the Great Seal of England; and who carried himself with an unconscious air of greatness that seemed to leave his friend and contemporary, Harry Marland, half a lifetime behind him.

"What I mean," Stephen said, "is this. I feel, as Aubrey does—only I feel it in more ways than one—that there is an inconsistency in the Prince's behaviour and ideas. His chief characteristics seem to clash with each other, and I cannot help wondering whether this is because some of them are the man himself, and some only put on, or at any rate, less real than the others. I am not criticizing, you understand; I am

only inquiring. His most undoubtedly genuine feeling, I suppose, is his love of fighting?"

"Right!" replied Harry, with warm approval; "there is nothing put on there."

"Then he seems also to have a great love of pageantry, a sort of romantic feeling for the sound and colour and fame of war."

"Well? We all have, haven't we?"

"Possibly," said Stephen; "but some of us wish we had not. The Prince himself, when the fighting is over, and he has got the best of it, professes a totally different creed; he puts courage and pride away, and brings out a most elaborate courtesy and humility in their place. Are they equally part of the man himself?"

"Yes!" replied Harry, defiantly.

"No," said Lord Bryan at the same instant, in a quiet tone, full of meaning.

Stephen looked from one to the other.

"Not equally," Lord Bryan explained; "they *are* the man himself, the most real thing about him. You hardly believe that? Let me tell you one more saying of his, the most significant of all. When the French King was first brought to him he offered, quite naturally and simply, to help him off with his armour. The King said with great dignity, 'Thank you, cousin, but after this it is not for you to serve me; no Prince

has ever won such honour in a single day.' The Prince was touched to the quick; he cannot bear that his honour should be another's misfortune. He said in a very low voice, 'God forgive me this victory.' The King evidently did not understand: he did not know the man; but I think I may claim that I do, and I say that he was never more himself than at that moment."

"So do I," cried Aubrey, passionately, "and so do you, Stephen. You know that was not acting; you know that no one could ever have invented anything so beautiful."

Stephen felt himself flush; for a moment it was as though the warm current from her heart was beating through his own veins.

"I agree," he said; "that was fine, and it was certainly instinctive. He seems to be made up of impulses; but that only increases the difficulty. Is it not extraordinary that the same man should make such a reply to one of his defeated prisoners, and order off another to be executed in cold blood?"

"That is what I felt," she replied; "but I suppose, as Harry says, that when we act on impulse we are often inconsistent. What do you say, Guy?"

"You have not got to the bottom of it yet, I think," said Lord Bryan. "The Prince is impulsive by nature, but he is no longer the boy he was at

Cressy. He has thought things out, and though his actions are still instinctive, they are very far from being haphazard or inconsistent. I do not say that he is perfect; I think he went over the line when he sent that message to the Cardinal; but you must remember that he was doubly tempted—first, because one of his most cherished principles had been violated, and secondly, because the offender was his old antagonist, the Church."

"What?" cried Stephen—"his antagonist? That makes him a more splendid riddle than ever. I had always thought of him as unusually devout."

"So he is," replied Lord Bryan. "If any man was ever born a Christian, he was. But on the point of war, he no more accepts the Church's view of Christianity than you do, or I, or any other Englishman who is honest with himself. He does not believe that war is always unlawful; he knows that all existence is a struggle, that we love fighting because it is the savour of life itself, and that in this world of forces everything must depend on force in the last resort. The time of peace may come, and no one prays for it more sincerely; but that will be the time of perfection, and in the mean time right must be righted, and wrong ended."

"Every nation," said Stephen, "being, of course, right in its own view. Does not that bring you to

arbitration between communities, just as we have justice now between man and man?"

He feared he had spoken too keenly, but Lord Bryan parried the thrust with unruffled ease.

"Who is to be the arbitrator? The Church, of course. Let us forget the Cardinal of Perigord, and grant the impartiality of the Church. How is the judgment to be enforced? Would you excommunicate a whole nation?"

"I agree that the Church is out of the question," replied Stephen; "but a jury of Kings would have power to carry out their own decrees."

"That means no more than an alliance of the ayes against the noes; or, possibly, of all against one. But I cannot help thinking that there are points on which a nation would rather fight the whole world single-handed than obey. Then I wonder whether your jury of Kings would be always right and always disinterested? May there not be cases too difficult for any judge? If Solomon himself were here, he could not fail to give a decision in favour of King Edward's claim to the crown of France; but if you and I were Frenchmen, should we submit to it?"

"The Prince would not, I am sure," said Stephen, smiling. "But he would be acting merely as the natural man. How does he bring war within the law of Christianity?"

"I think he would answer that by saying that Christianity is not a law, but a light; a hope for the world, but a way for the Christian only, who is not of the world, though he is in it. It is an hypocrisy to pretend that the world is Christian. What good can come of hypocrisy?—of nations professing principles in which, as nations, they do not believe? The true Church, which is the body of the faithful, and nothing else, cannot be strengthened by any such professions; the official Church encourages them because it thereby enlarges its own borders, but it brings both confusion and dishonesty into human affairs by doing so."

The argument pleased Stephen as much as it puzzled him.

"I agree about the Church," he said warmly, "but I am still in the dark about the Prince. Is it his creed that a man should be a Christian in private, and a savage in public?"

"Savage is a difficult word," said Lord Bryan, pleasantly. "May I change it? May I put the case in this way? There are among men some masculine virtues, and some feminine. Where the masculine alone have been cultivated, life has been disordered, perhaps savage. Christianity has given us the feminine virtues; the Church would have us practise them to the exclusion of the masculine. We soldiers believe that this would only lead to disorder of the same kind."

"You make Christianity, in short, a counsel of perfection, to be postponed indefinitely?"

"We should do so, but for chivalry."

"Let me understand you," said Stephen. "Chivalry, as I have seen it from a distance, I have taken to mean a love of fighting, a love of pageantry, and a fantastic love of women, mixed into a rather unwholesome ferment."

"You have lived abroad," replied Lord Bryan; "there is no place in England for that kind of folly, and, so far as I know, there never has been. For us chivalry is a plain rule of conduct, by which a man may live in a world of men, without savagery and without monkery."

"Good!" exclaimed Stephen; "but how?"

"Look at the Prince," said Lord Bryan; "it is written large in him. He is pious and courteous, the brother of all brave men, the servant of the weak, the beaten, and the suffering. In short, he loves God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. What is that?"

"That is Christianity; but I ask you again, how does loving your neighbour come to include fighting him, or taking his life?"

"I reply with another question. Are you not confusing the unreal with the real—putting the material before the spiritual? The warfare of every one of us

must end in death; we need not love a man less because it falls to us to strike the final stroke. It is only the hatred, the treachery, the selfishness, that make the crime of murder; and what injury can the real man suffer except those inflicted by himself?"

"Does your Prince act up to his creed in that?" asked Stephen. "I know, of course, that he is fearless of himself; but would he, for example, take the death of a friend as no injury?"

"A man is no soldier," replied Lord Bryan, "unless he remembers every morning, when he wakes, that this may be the day on which his life or his comrade's will be required of him. No one could face that parting better than the Prince. I know, because I saw him say good-bye to Audley."

"Audley?" asked Sir Henry. "Is James Audley dead? You did not tell us that."

"No," said Guy, "when I left he was making a good recovery; but if he did not die, it was not because he was not ready. When we were setting forward to meet the final attack, he came to the Prince and volunteered to do what he could to break the French line before it reached us. I suppose his offer might be called fantastic; but it was very coolly made and very effectually carried out."

"Tell us!" said Aubrey, imperiously.

"There is really nothing to tell; he came up and

said, 'You know, sir, I vowed that I would lead the charge if ever we met the French King.' He knelt on one knee, as if to ask a favour. The Prince's face set like iron. 'Very well, James,' he said. 'Good-bye, and God bless you.' There was no time to be lost. Audley got up and went down the hill with four squires behind him. We saw him divide the rush for a moment like a rock thrown down into a stream; then they re-formed and went over him, but they came on perceptibly slower and less steadily."

"How many were killed?" asked Aubrey.

"Of Audley and his men? Not one of the five, by George!" cried Harry. "The squires picked him up, good men, and we picked up the squires. They made their fortunes; Audley divided between them all the land the Prince gave him, that same evening."

"Did the Prince approve of that?"

"He gave Audley as much again, and was glad to do it. I think he was more grateful to those four than even their master was; he loves Sir James better than any reasonable man could love himself."

"It is a fine character," said Stephen. "Still," he went on in the tone of one not yet convinced, "it is strange to see so much feeling side by side with so much hardness."

"Pardon me," answered Lord Bryan, "if I change your word again. He is not so much hard as stern,

Injure him personally, and he will give you good for evil; break a rule of the game, and he will exact the forfeit to the uttermost, as he would expect to have it exacted from himself. It is only on such terms that the code can be preserved; you may forgive the offender, but if you remit the penalty you spare your own feelings at the expense of those who come after you. So he would have made an example of the Castellan of Amposta, as he always would of any one who played false—man, woman, or child. If a whole town went over to the enemy, I believe he would execute them all relentlessly. His people know the conditions on which they serve him; they know that he asks nothing from them that he is not prepared to give himself."

"You think they really understand him?" said Stephen.

"Whether they know it or not, they understand him; you would not wonder if you had heard him speaking to the men on the morning of the battle. 'It is our business,' he said, 'to lead, and yours to follow keenly, mind as well as body. If we come off with life and victory, we shall be better friends than ever; if the chances are against us, and we go the way of all flesh, remember this, that you shall never be forgotten or dishonoured; whatever our rank, we will all drink of the same cup with you to-day.'"

Stephen's guard was broken at last; the words went through his heart. He knew that Guy was right; this man had laid hold on life itself; no time or change would ever still the reverberation of such words. He sat silent, blinking at the fire.

"Guy," said Sir Henry, putting out his hand to the wine flagon, "will you take anything more? Then perhaps you would like to go up; you have had a long day."

XLI

THE two soldiers left Gardenleigh next day, in almost opposite directions. Lord Bryan was returning to take over a command in Devonshire; Harry Marland, who was to remain only a few weeks in England, had a longer journey before him into Cheshire, where his wife and children were staying at his father-in-law's house. On his way he was to spend a night at Portishead with his brother Edmund; but his parents would not hear of his starting until the last possible moment, and in order to leave them entirely to each other's society, Stephen proposed to ride with Lord Bryan for some little distance upon his journey westward, and return at his leisure during the afternoon.

"I suppose," he said to Aubrey, as they were leaving the house, "that I may speak to him about Ralph's affairs?"

"To Guy?" she replied. "Of course; but—you know who his wife was?"

Stephen hesitated and looked round.

She lowered her voice. "The Bishop's niece; his sister Katharine was her mother."

"Lady Salisbury? Then he will have great influence with the Bishop?"

"Very great; but he may not agree with us. He has his own view about everything."

The prospect of the discussion pleased Stephen; he smiled and nodded to her confidently. She shook her head in reply.

"Be careful!" she said. "I should like you to understand one another."

So for the first part of the ride he set himself to observe rather than to talk. His reflections in every way bore out the estimate of his companion which he had formed the night before. This was an altogether different type from any of those which he had hitherto met with, and it was the more interesting to him because it was the type of a finished character, and one evidently developed in circumstances of which he himself had had no experience. The original nature of the man was visible in the clear, frank eyes, the singularly sweet and ready smile, the simple courtesy of his manners; but there was added to all this an ease and certainty which ran through every act and word, and which was far too perfect, Stephen felt, to have come to any man by nature. His movements were neither slow nor hasty, his replies were never hesitating, yet never unconsidered; he talked and rode with the same mastery, keeping an even pace and

meeting every emergency with a faultless seat and the lightest of hands. He had all the soldierly directness of Harry Marland without any of his crudeness; and as much dignity and power, Stephen thought, as the Bishop, but with less self-consciousness and a total absence of pride. Edmund was nearer to him there, and nearer too, perhaps, in other ways; but the world that Edmund could only conquer by agony and surrender seemed to be for Lord Bryan a brilliant and familiar tilt-yard, where he played out the game of life with perfect skill and fearlessness. These are seldom attributes of the deepest kind of character; but if Guy had his limitations, Stephen found no trace of superficiality or slightness in him. On the contrary, he seemed to possess some secret, some wisdom hidden in his own heart, which made existence so easy and so unperplexed; his face was calm rather than sanguine, as if he saw both good and evil days coming, and looked beyond them both.

The power of command he certainly had in a very unusual degree, as Stephen saw when they came into Selwood and found the archers hardly yet ready to march. Some of them had not quite recovered from the potations of the night before, others had been with difficulty retrieved from odd corners of the town; two of the squires were disputing over some misunderstanding of their orders, and a crowd of idlers was in

everybody's way at once. But when Lord Bryan appeared, the tangle unravelled itself in a moment; his voice expressed neither surprise nor dissatisfaction, but his air of quiet expectation cleared away all difficulties. They seemed to vanish, not because he saw them, but just because he did not see them. His men appeared to regain their discipline and self-respect almost without an effort of their own; they were what their commander made them, and followed him, as the Black Prince had bidden them, with their minds as well as their bodies.

Their first stage was a comparatively short one, but it was not till they were nearing the end of it that Stephen ventured to approach the subject of Ralph Tremur.

"I suppose," he asked his companion, "that your road will be the same as that by which the Bishop travelled when he left Gardenleigh not long ago?"

"Exactly the same as far as Exeter," replied Lord Bryan, "and probably with the same halts; he and I ride very much the same pace."

"I saw that he rode more like a soldier than a priest," said Stephen, "and I thought he had quite a military idea of discipline too."

"Carew here will tell you about that," said Lord Bryan, calling up the squire who was riding nearest to

him. "William, you can give us the story about the insurrection of the Grenvilles?"

The move was too opportune to be accidental, but there was so little sign of intention that Stephen, rather to his own surprise, accepted the check without a struggle, and occupied himself with the Grenville history for what remained of the ride. But he determined not to let himself be baulked when the midday halt was called, for that would be his last opportunity He was relieved, therefore, to find, on reaching the inn, that Lord Bryan and he were to dine alone together.

"Now," said Guy, as soon as the service was finished, "I think you had something to tell me about Ralph Tremur."

Stephen had intended to be very cautious, and to confine himself as far as possible to the *rôle* of inquirer; but there was something about his companion's frankness which compelled him to imitate it. He spoke out at once and felt, too, that he was speaking with a simplicity and ease that were above his ordinary level.

Guy heard him to the end with great attention, asking a question here and there, but with no sign of bias. When the whole story was before him, he turned a little so as to face Stephen more fully, and began to speak without hesitation.

"You may be thinking," he said, "that my relationship to the Bishop is likely to influence me in his

favour. If so, I beg that you will put any such idea out of your mind from the beginning. It is part of your case—Ralph's case—that the Bishop has been hard and overbearing. I need not commit myself; I only remind you that if that is his character, as you believe, you may be sure that after many years of intimacy it cannot have escaped me. As to his position, the Marlands will tell you that I am no slave to authority of any kind, though I am before everything a servant; the cause I serve has for long been that of the small against the great, the humble against the powerful."

"The Prince?" asked Stephen, in surprise.

"The cause of the Prince is the struggling cause—that of the Commons. I am used to rebellion against dignitaries, and I should find it easy to sympathize with Ralph if it were not for doubts about the goodness of his quarrel."

Stephen flushed. "You do not sympathize with him—you do not like his religious position?"

"I know nothing of theology," replied Lord Bryan; "but from my point of view it almost seems as if the man had no religious position, and therefore no position worth fighting for."

"Oh, surely!" said Stephen. "He opposes the Bishop; if his adversary has a position, so has he."

"I do not think it follows. My view may be a

wrong one or a narrow one, but it is the view of the best men of our generation. In that view we live, and we have the right to live, only by virtue of our devotion to something greater than ourselves. I heard it well put by a monk not long ago—*ad serviendum venisti, non ad regendum:* 'you are here to serve, not to rule.' Is not that a true saying?"

Stephen's thoughts flew back to the morning's scene in Selwood and his reflections on it.

"It may be true," he said: "I have not thought of it; but I confess I am surprised to hear it from you."

Guy left the personal point untouched. "But look around you," he said earnestly; "look at the lives you know. The Bishop, whatever you may say of his methods, has served the Church for fifty years, as Sir Henry has served the King; Edmund, I often think, stands higher still—he is the servant of God. Ralph alone follows no cause but his own, and no man of whom that is true can have any reality; he has no unity in him, he is a wandering fire—an *ignis fatuus* of the marshes."

"Ralph serves truth," said Stephen, "and that is to serve mankind."

"It may be," replied Lord Bryan; "but what has he ever established? Has not his life been spent in denying? What is the truth that lies behind all these

denials? What is it that he has not denied? In what does he find his peace?"

At another time, and against another antagonist, Stephen might have found abundant resources for argument and even for eloquence. He was under no temptation, even as it was, to give up his belief in Ralph and in the righteousness of his cause; but he was confused by a kind of echo in his own mind which seemed to double the force of what he heard. He remembered how Edmund had said that there was no proposition known which Ralph had not denied at one time or another, and how Ralph himself in three terrible words had accepted the life that "knew not what peace was." He saw, too, that his difficulty came in part from the power which Guy possessed, of compelling him for the moment to look at the whole question from a point of view which was strange to him. Left to himself, he would no doubt be able to bring it into focus, to find the necessary reconciliation; but while the foreground was filled with so splendid a figure he was distracted and almost dazzled. He only knew that it was impossible to meet this man as an enemy; and if he could have done so, he felt, as he looked him in the face, that he would be encountering armour better proven than his own. Guy's last word dwelt in his mind—"In what does he find his peace?"—and insensibly drew the whole current

of his thought away from Ralph to the personality living and shining before him.

Lord Bryan's voice broke in upon his reverie. "I am afraid," he was saying, "that it is almost time for us to say good-bye. I see my men getting under way."

Stephen followed him to the window, and they stood for a moment watching the archers as they prepared to move off.

"What do they think they serve?" asked Stephen.

"They could not tell you, you think? Perhaps not; a soldier is generally thoughtless when he speaks, and dumb when he thinks. But you must not be deceived by that; these fellows serve their country, and they know it, in a way of their own. After all, we too have each our own meaning for the name of England."

He stopped a little abruptly for once, but when Stephen turned he went on in the same tone.

"You will find in any thatch some reeds drier than the rest; but fire is fire to all of them, and the slower stuff takes it from the quicker."

"Do you not think," asked Stephen, "that they will come to learn, in the same way, a feeling wider and deeper than mere love of country?"

Lord Bryan smiled and took a lighter tone. "I had no idea," he said, "that you were so old-fashioned

you will wait a long time if you wait for that river to flow uphill again."

"I know what you mean," replied Stephen. "They have been telling me—and I have seen it myself—that national feeling is running high just now in England. But I doubt if that is a stream; to me it looks more like a tide, which flows and ebbs, as it has done before, and will do again from time to time."

"I will meet you half way," said Lord Bryan, smiling. "Let us call it a tidal river; that gives you the ebb and flow, and leaves me the natural direction of the current, which I am convinced has its source somewhere in the highlands of human nature."

Stephen recognized, not without pleasure, that in the tactics of metaphor he had met his equal; but he made one more effort to save the position.

"If it came from the highlands I should expect a wider and purer stream."

"It will widen before the end," replied Lord Bryan; "and I regret your other word. Perhaps you have been hearing some loud talk from those who stay at home; that is part of the patriotism which looks for what it can get, rather than what it can give. You should speak to Aubrey about her country."

"I know what you mean," said Stephen, hurriedly, "and I withdraw that word. But if we are to think of giving, would it not be better to begin at once with

giving to all? Why must we always think of ourselves first? A pyramid does not spring from its narrowest point."

"No," said Guy, "but a tree does; and human life is much more like a tree than a pyramid. Even if you are to build, you would not build a dozen cities at once. Let us set up our own first, and make it the joy of the whole earth."

"Ah!" cried Stephen, "you come near me there."

"I am glad," said Guy, "for I am afraid our talk must end there for the present. It is time for me to be gone. Remember if ever you come West that you have friends at Tor Bryan."

Stephen went to the door with him, and waved a cheerful farewell as he rode away; but when he turned to call for his own horse he felt as if his day had lost the sun.

XLII

THE shadow continued to lie upon Stephen throughout his homeward journey. Thanks to his horse's instinct, or to some equally unconscious knowledge of his own, he made the right choice at every turning; but he saw nothing of the road, and could not have told whether or not he had ever passed that way before. Lord Bryan's visit, though it had been in itself a bright and stirring episode, seemed to have roused from sleep all the cares that lay about his path, and set them on to snarl and dog his footsteps afresh. To begin with, there was Ralph. Nothing had been heard of Ralph for months, and nothing need be apprehended at this moment more than at any other; yet since his case had been laid before Lord Bryan, Stephen felt that it had in some way taken a turn for the worse. This impression, he reasoned with himself, was a mere personal illusion; but the trouble was in no way lightened by being traced to his own sense of failure in the defence of Ralph against Guy's criticism. Why he had so failed he could not now understand. The truth of Guy's view of life appeared to him upon reflection as striking as ever, but it no

longer seemed to afford any argument against Ralph or in favour of his antagonist. Where there is untrue or unjust affirmation, he told himself indignantly, there, for the sake of all men, there must be some one to deny. How can it be said of such a champion that he is the servant of none? Is it no service that one man should die for the people? still more that he should spend his life in that barren desert of denials which Ralph had accepted as his portion? Is it not, he might have asked Lord Bryan, thanks to such humble service as this, that you and those whom you hold up for admiration are able to find room for your souls to live and breathe and build the fearless towers and palaces of your more spiritual imagination? To this, he assured himself, there was no answer; but he remained none the less dissatisfied. There, after all, stood the lofty and beautiful life that Guy and his Prince had built—a life that all might imitate; and beside it the work of opposition and negation, however necessary, however courageous and devoted, seemed a meaner and less ennobling task, and one not altogether free from the contamination of malevolent zeal. Was it possible, he wondered at the blackest moment of his meditation, that the Bishop's theory of demoniac possession had some reason in it, after all? Was Ralph's insane fury due not so much to a fault in his own nature as to the presence of a spirit to whom

all iconoclasts are inevitably given over, and whose influence cannot be excluded from any task of pure destruction, even when it is a very citadel of tyranny and falsehood that must be laid in ruin? How should any nation, under the leading of such a spirit, establish or even conceive a type of society which might endure for the admiration of the whole earth?

Once more at this point he regretted his enforced parting from Guy. It had moved him strongly to find in this man, of a generation so far from his own, a touch of the hope and the enthusiasm which he had come to regard as the message committed in a special degree to himself, and practically, as he assumed, unheard of in the world before the century in which he had been born. Mere Utopians he had always disdained; he had claimed to preach only the practical, and even to foretell facts. Guy, too, was no dreamer of mere possibilities; he wished to reform life, not to re-make it: he might have proved to have a real sympathy, Stephen thought, with his own outlook towards the future. But there again the thread of his reverie caught and tangled as it ran off the skein; Guy had declared for the method he had so long decried—the devotion which begins at home and runs the risk of staying there. He had even laughed at Stephen's cosmopolitan ideal, and labelled it as "old-fashioned"—old-fashioned five centuries before

it had come in vogue in Stephen's world! The historian of the Future groaned with the pain of a new suspicion—could he have been inventing that which was not new, and discovering that which was non-existent? Were his own Uplands, after all, in no nearer latitude than the New Atlantis or the City of the Sun, and his message no newer than the other hopes of man?

By the time he had reached this point he was passing through the town of Selwood. As he climbed the slope on the far side of the market-place, and struck into the road that turned to the left along the river, he was vividly reminded of his first arrival in the place, and his meeting with Aubrey in the old life. He remembered then, with an infinite sense of comfort, that whatever might be the true value of his hopes and theories, they had, at any rate, brought him near to her; though she, like Guy, had withstood him in the name of patriotism, she had never sided with the forces against him, or lowered him in his own esteem. In the warm glow of this recollection he forgot that he had not yet wholly solved the mystery in which her present life was wrapped; or rather, he had unconsciously changed his view, and while he felt his own feelings coming more and more into line with hers, he had almost ceased to demand that she should completely draw aside

the veil that lay between her memory and his own.

He crossed the stream at a quicker pace, and was glad to find himself once more in Gardenleigh territory. The sun was down on the horizon now, and the flush in the sky above seemed to deepen the shadow of twilight under the October woods as he pressed onwards up the southward face of the hill. On the down above, in the sombre entrance of the avenue, he could see a woman's figure leaning wearily against the wall, beside the gate. It was Aubrey, and his heart stirred as he saw that she was waiting for him. She held open the gate when he came up, and as he passed through he saw that there were tears upon her face. In a moment he had dismounted and was turning towards her with his bridle on his arm; but before he could speak she had buried her head upon his shoulder.

Lady Marland had died at midday, an hour after Harry had left for Portishead.

XLIII

THE days which followed were darker still. Stephen had had no previous experience of the preparations for an English funeral, and there seemed to him to be something unnatural about the gloom that lay upon the house; it had the deadening oppression of a nightmare, and he felt at times as though it would never lift again. Edmund and Harry, Aubrey and himself—he saw them all busied with duties which must be performed neither whole-heartedly nor half-heartedly, all going about continually under the burden of a meaningless behaviour, equally far from any true semblance of grief or joy. A tacit and nerveless consideration for each other, a conventional regard for the expectations of a wider circle—these cloudy spectres had breathed an icy mist on all the more human feelings, had forbidden sorrow its moments of agony and relief, its free expression and its high-hearted resistance, and almost seemed for the time to have bound life about with the winding-sheet of the dead, stifling every voice and constraining every movement with its frigid and unlovely folds.

But this misery of deadness was not to last; it

vanished for ever at the moment when they all stood in Gardenleigh Church and heard the first words of man's immemorial petition for his beloved dead. "*Requiem eternam,*" said a voice that was and was not the voice of Edmund, "*Requiem eternam dona ei Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei.*" Tears sprang to Stephen's eyes; he felt himself strangled and shaken by a sudden passion. It could be no grief of his own, for that which lay before him under the blind and silent pall had never been for him the symbol of a deep or long familiar affection. But he saw around him not only the sorrow but the helplessness of those whom he loved; he saw old age and manhood and girlish youth all alike bowed to drink of that cup which must always keep its bitterness while man keeps his human nature. He had himself laid his father in the grave; but that parting, terrible as it was, had come upon him when he was alone and in a far country; it had made a complete break in his own life, and yet had troubled the happiness of no one else, so that he had come to think of it as a grief peculiar to himself, and had never realized that death was hourly bringing to others what it had once brought to him. Now he saw that the greatest of human sorrows is one and indivisible, and that whatever immunities man may learn or wrest from nature in the bright world of the future, he can never, even

for a day, shut his ears against the passing bell, or deaden his heart to the *De Profundis* of his race.

The sense of pity was deepened yet more as he looked round upon the company of friends and neighbours who filled the church. If men are but as grass, that to-day is and to-morrow is cut down and laid away, what, then, were these but the long fallen leaves of a very far-off summer, to whose hollow forms some strange, airy current of his own imagination had for a time given back a lifelike movement and a whisper of the human voice? Yet again he saw that, in their love and grief and hope, there was a reality beyond that of their bodily existence, and he fell to wondering whether the hour that was waiting for them all, and for him too in his turn, would bring upon them any change of the true self, comparable to that which must befall the body. What end or what beginning is it that we peer at through the name of death? How are we to think of the dead, or what to desire for them and for ourselves?

A second time the calm, sad, unwavering voice began its deep music—"*Requiem eternam dona ei Domine;*" and then, through the murmur of the voices that echoed it, a second time he heard the words which followed: "*Et lux perpetua luceat ei.*" The flood of thought which came upon him seemed to bear him up no longer; he sank to a depth where

no light or sound of the material world could reach his consciousness. When he returned to the upper air it was to find the service over, and Edmund standing face to face with the little company of mourners, as if he could not let them go without one more word.

"My friends," he said, "it has been the custom of our people from a time beyond memory to speak of death in the language of the Psalmist—to say that man's life is a shadow, that he passes away and his place knows him no more. We cannot deny that it is true, yet we cannot forget that it is true only with the truth of this world. For us in these later days another view is possible—the view, not of men who must remain behind, but rather of spirits who are upon the point of following. We may bethink ourselves that for those who are dead, and for us too, since we shall soon be with them, to depart hence is not to perish, but to survive the perishing of all that was less real about us, the fading of all the shadows with which our life was darkened. To-day, therefore, in this service of separation, we have been weeping not only for the loss that has befallen the home of our transitory existence, but also for our own continued blindness that will not let us see life as it is. One whom we love has been released from this darkness and bondage of time; she has passed, as the greatest of all poets was once

permitted to pass before his death, from the human life to the divine, from the temporal to the eternal. In our prayers for her we must keep this always before us, lest we speak the old familiar phrases with the understanding of a bygone age, and deceive ourselves with words of comfortable sound that are the very denial of our only true consolation. If we ask that God may give His beloved eternal rest, we must think of no such sleep as that which we have known ourselves. They shall rest—not from their work, but from their labours; not from their service, but from the wilfulness and vacillation that alone could make it wearisome: they shall cease—not from the active consciousness which is the life of the true self, but from the appetites and trivialities by which that life is here continually broken. Let us think of them, therefore, as we see them pictured upon their tombs: lying motionless and with folded hands, in token that for them the warfare of the body has been accomplished, and the will surrendered to the eternal peace; with eyes upturned and open, to signify that they know no longer the alternation of day and darkness, but enjoy continually all knowledge, all love, and all fulfilment, as it were in one changeless moment of perpetual light."

XLIV

On the following morning Harry Marland started for the second time on his journey to the North. Edmund stayed some days longer, and said the Requiem again on the octave of his mother's death. Stephen and Aubrey looked forward to his departure with the greatest anxiety; while he remained, Sir Henry showed a strength and self-control that were beyond all expectation, but it seemed impossible that these should continue in the same degree after he had gone, for he spent every moment of the day with his father, and appeared to be more indispensable to him than ever. But when the time came they found that they had under-estimated the old man's courage: he continued to show the same power of patient, half-humorous resistance to his troubles which had for so long been characteristic of him, and rather gave than needed consolation and encouragement; the lamp was burning low, but the dying light made a brave flicker, and would brighten, while it lasted, everything about it.

Stephen watched with admiration, but with a presentiment that the strain of this effort would hasten rather than delay the end. He saw more than one

sign that Sir Henry himself was conscious of a coming change, and he was not surprised when at last the moment came for speaking openly.

It was a bright, still morning—the second day of November—and Aubrey had asked him, as usual, to keep her uncle company for an hour while she was busy with the affairs of the household. Sir Henry was sitting by the window of the solar, and seemed to be occupied, as he often was, or pretended to be, in trying to count the wild duck which came upon the lake in increasing numbers at this time of the year. His attention appeared to be entirely given to these birds, and for some time Stephen's conversation with him was limited to the identification of mallards, coots, and pochards; but in spite of the zest with which this pastime was followed, Stephen received an impression, for which he could hardly perhaps have accounted, that there were more serious matters to be discussed that morning, which were being postponed from minute to minute from some kind of reluctance to approach them directly.

At last Sir Henry turned from the window with a sigh, and drew a small packet from under his cloak, which lay by him upon the window-seat.

"Stephen," he said abruptly, "this is your money."

Stephen held out his hand mechanically to receive the packet, but his surprise showed plainly in his face.

"I want to give it back to you," Sir Henry continued, "because—well, I will tell you why later on; it will be quite safe for you to keep it yourself, now that the whole house knows it is in my strong box. Put it out of sight, and say nothing about it to any one. And now I want to talk to you about other things."

Stephen expressed his readiness, but for some time nothing followed. Sir Henry was once more gazing out over the water; he seemed to be still embarrassed, and Stephen guessed rightly that the "other things" of which he spoke were in reality nothing but other methods of approaching the same point.

"You will think me a foolish old man," Sir Henry began at last—"and faint-hearted, perhaps—but I have been thinking a good deal about what Edmund said in church that day. Do you remember?"

"I remember every word," replied Stephen; "but which part of it has been in your mind especially?"

"The part about the perishing of the temporal life. I thought it very beautiful." He arched his eyebrows, and made a deprecating gesture with his hands. "You know, I always think Edmund says very beautiful things; but I want to know how it looked to you, this idea that Time is not real at all."

Stephen hesitated; his interest was almost too great for words.

"I thought you would be sure to have an opinion," Sir Henry continued; "you have been accustomed to deal with these matters, and I have not: but the time has come—well, I am more interested in such thoughts than I used to be. To-day is All Souls' Day; we make little of it here because the day before—All Saints'—is their big festival at Croonington, and our people like to go there; but I was thinking a good deal last night of my dear wife and the boys, in the church yonder. I like to believe that they are not sleeping—that they have some knowledge of us, or at the least some memory—but I should be still more glad if you thought I might accept what Edmund said about Time as the truth; true, that is, in the way in which I understand it. I dare say you see why."

"Not quite," Stephen replied. "I am sure that I agree with all that he said, but I have not yet caught the whole of your meaning."

"Why, it makes all the difference if it is true; the real sadness of these partings has always seemed to me not so much that one goes where the rest must follow, as that if one dies long before another, they cannot ever meet again in their old relation. I must either find strange men where I lost my own lads, or they must greet an old fellow whom they never knew. But if Time is unreal, then so, I suppose, is age; we shall all be just ourselves, and no more disguised from

each other by our years than we are here by our clothes."

The wistful and humble simplicity with which he spoke touched Stephen profoundly.

"I have no doubt whatever," he said, "that you are right. But it is I who am learning from you; I am afraid I have never really studied these questions —certainly not in the way you supposed."

"But I thought you had many ideas of your own about the future?"

"I have been interested in the future of the race; but that is different."

"Yes, yes," said Sir Henry, more humbly still; "you make me ashamed of my selfishness, but it is too late to teach me now. You might tell me everything that is to happen on earth in the next five hundred years, but if I had the choice I would rather hear what is to happen to me in the five minutes after death."

Stephen's face burned. In the world where his theories of the Future had won so easy a triumph, no one had ever faced him with such an answer, but it suddenly stood revealed to him that ten thousand must have been thinking then what he had heard none speak until now—now, in the past he had affected to despise.

"You are right," he said again, "you are right, you and Edmund; your future is the real one."

He spoke fervently, driving the point home against himself as if in expiation of his old folly. Sir Henry saw the emotion; the true cause of it was hidden from him, but he was grateful for what he understood.

"I cannot tell you," he said, laying his hand on Stephen's knee, "what a support you have been to me."

"I wish I could have done more," Stephen replied; "but I can only repeat what I promised before, that I will stay as long as you need me."

Sir Henry looked at him as if hesitating once more; then he said—

"Stephen, this is what I wished to tell you: it will not be for very long now that your promise will bind you. That is why I gave you back the money."

"I hope you are mistaken," said Stephen.

"I hope not," he replied, and he looked away again across the lake.

For some time neither of them spoke; then Sir Henry turned again to Stephen with his old half-humorous air of weariness.

"I can talk with a man," he said, "but I never could face a woman. Will you send Aubrey to me now?"

XLV

From week to week the year faded quietly to its close. The chestnuts had cast their splendid mantles almost in a single night, the beeches stood ankle-deep in the rustle of their own rich brown leaves; but the woods were green with moss and gay with the bright pink berries of the service tree, and in the park the elms, after all the rest were bare, still rose like great golden clouds against the pure faint blue of the sky—clouds thinner and more ethereal every day, but exquisitely radiant to the last. Even December, in this warm green West, seemed to have none of the rigour of winter. Night came earlier and stayed longer, but she was neither cold nor angry. Nature seemed brooding over her hopes rather than her memories; already the deep combes were starred with a few pale primroses, and thrushes sang above them as they had not been singing since June.

Edmund came and went and came again. He spoke no word of anxiety about his father, but when Stephen told him of the return of his money and the conversation that had followed, he seemed in no way surprised, and confessed shortly afterwards that he had

gone so far as to send a messenger to Harry at Bordeaux, begging him to obtain leave from the Prince to spend the remainder of the winter at home. The man returned with the welcome news that this request had been readily granted, and that Harry, who was already back in England, would hasten down to Gardenleigh as soon as he had delivered the letters and concluded the business with which he was charged.

The delay was not a long one. Some few days later Stephen was walking back alone from Croonington; rain had been falling, and he took the road instead of the pathway across the fields. He had passed through the Bath Gate into the park, and was descending the steep slope to the brook, when he heard behind him the hollow sound of hoofs resounding under the great vaulted archway of the gatehouse. He turned and saw Harry Marland, as he had once seen the Bishop, riding out from the stone frame of the arch and coming rapidly towards him.

"Well met, Stephen!" he cried, but with more relief than cordiality in his voice. He dismounted at the same moment, and gave his horse to one of the men who followed him, with an order to go straight to the house. "We will walk," he said shortly to Stephen, and they took the footpath to the left round the lake.

As they went he questioned Stephen minutely about

his father's health, and was evidently far from satisfied with the result. He became more and more moody, and walked more and more slowly, though the dusk was deepening every moment, and a light misty rain was drawing down over the valley. When they reached the fallen tree he stopped altogether, as if unwilling to go on to the house until he had made a further effort to lighten his mind of its burden.

"I cannot understand it," he said for the fifth time, "and I must say that you have not helped me, Stephen. Men like my father do not die without a cause."

"I do not claim to understand it either," Stephen replied; "but I think it may be equally true that a man of his age and infirmity does not go on living without some strong animating principle which seems to be lacking here."

"That sounds well," replied Harry, with a touch of bitterness, "but it is too fine-drawn for me. I have seen men die of many things, but never anything negative—except starvation."

"Your father has eaten less and less lately."

"And why is that?" asked Harry, brusquely. "Why do you not admit at once that he is worrying himself to death?"

"I see no sign of it."

"No sign? He has talked to you, they tell me, quite openly; you have seen Ralph, you have seen the

Bishop, you know the whole trouble from beginning to end."

Stephen began to see the meaning of his companion's somewhat sullen attitude.

"Yes," he replied, in a conciliatory tone, "it is a great trouble, that; but I do not think it has counted for much lately. Of course, it may come upon us again at any moment."

"That is it," exclaimed Harry, fiercely; "it is Ralph who is killing him. I wish we might never hear the fellow's name again."

Stephen started as if he had been lashed with a whip, but he recovered himself and held his tongue. He stood looking away over the water and up the misty hill to Aubrey's seat. Harry, having once set his grievance spinning, continued to flog it till it whirled and hummed as though it would never stop.

While he was speaking, arguing, grumbling, Stephen's resolution was hardening.

"Well," he said, when the tirade came to an end, "what can we do?"

"You can end the whole affair: tell Ralph out and out that my father's life is more precious than his; say that you have no more encouragement for him; he must get on as best he can without you."

Stephen again mastered his indignation. "I have

promised your father," he replied, "that I will stand by him to the end in this matter."

"Have you?" retorted Harry. "Then I absolve you of that promise."

Stephen did not answer. As the words sank into his mind a sudden sense of crisis came upon him; the situation seemed to define itself. At the same moment he saw that the rain had ceased, and the veil of mist had receded a little up the hill. At the top it was still heavy and motionless, and seemed to have rolled together into a dense mass in the centre, where the gap divided the garden avenue, and where Aubrey had so often planned to build. He could almost fancy that he saw the house of her imagination, the house of the centuries to come, the house which he had left to follow her.

Harry saw that he was moved, and thought himself the cause.

"My dear fellow," he said, with a sudden return of kindlier feeling, "I have hurt you. Forgive me, forgive me; I have said more than I meant."

Stephen took his outstretched hand gratefully, and they walked home together without referring to the subject again. As they passed an open space between the trees the garden slope was visible once more, and Stephen saw without surprise that the phantom house was still looming upon its gray terrace of misty twilight.

XLVI

Beliefs and associations which it would take many successive impressions to fix upon the mind in later life, are often in early youth produced by a single vivid experience, and when tested long afterwards prove to be little better than illusions. Stephen, who had not spent a Christmas in England for twenty years, now saw his childish recollections sadly falsified. He remembered only a succession of hard white winters; but this one was green and mild, without a thought of snow. He supposed that the season would bring with it a general and irresistible feeling of gaiety; and here he found himself in a silent and anxious house, looking out upon a future clouded with uncertainty and heavy with threatening storm. Some ceremony there certainly was, some observance of tradition, but all that was festive in it was left to the young and irresponsible; for the others the time was rather one of memories and sad comparisons, thrust out of sight, but never laid to rest by the dutiful assumption of cheerfulness.

The week went slowly by, and December seemed to be drawing to a peaceful end. It was a long-established custom of the Marlands that the household

should sit up on the last night to watch the passing of the old year, and to wish each other God-speed in the first moments of that which was beginning. To Stephen, and perhaps to some of the others, this observance seemed on the present occasion to have an almost ominous appropriateness; but no one ventured to suggest that it should be abandoned, and long after Sir Henry was asleep the little company of four was still sitting round the fire in the great gallery, and talking fitfully as they waited for midnight, while the servants were assembled in the same fashion in the hall below.

Even at such a time, when all were quiet and a little weary, differences of character and outlook could not fail to produce their visible effect. Of the circle in the gallery, Edmund was the most silent; he had that day been feeling more anxiety about his father's condition than he had allowed any one else to suspect, and his face, though serene in its expression, was deeply marked with lines of pain. Still, in spite of all, it was serene, and in strong contrast to that of his brother, for whom any unwonted activity of the mind increased rather than diminished the necessity for activity of the body. For days he had been growing more and more restless; he was troubled about his father, he was troubled about his wife, whose condition would not allow of her making the long journey from Cheshire

to rejoin him; he was troubled about Ralph and the Bishop, and about his own attitude and Stephen's towards their difference. To-day he was at fever point, unable to stay for a moment in any one position, and constantly uttering half-intelligible murmurs and exclamations, by which he only added to the fatigue both of others and of himself.

Aubrey had for a long time done her best to draw him into a more tranquil state of mind; but this had proved impossible, if only from the abruptness with which he would leave the room and return to it on various errands of his own restless invention. She gave him up at last, and turned to Stephen, who responded at once, as he always did, to the charm of her warm-hearted sympathy, spiced even now and made more cordial by the pinch of playful malice that she so seldom omitted. For the hundredth time he discovered what had struck him at his first meeting with her, that the secret of her perfect companionship lay in the combination of certainty and unexpectedness; you could always foretell and rely upon her feelings, but the turn of her thought was a continual slight surprise. From the beginning he had felt sure of her friendship, and almost sure of a stronger liking; but though she had never for a moment played him false, she had constantly mystified and defeated him by little feints, ambushes, delays, and counter-strokes too skilful

to be unintended, yet too playful to be intended seriously. She would give, it appeared, but not yet; for what, then, was she waiting? She had long ago forgotten, or seemed to have forgotten, her dread of the unknown future towards which he was calling her, just as he himself had ceased to be troubled by the fact that he did not know the whole secret of her life; yet the end, the moment of decision, seemed to be no nearer than it had been many times before. But Stephen, though he was as far as ever from understanding her, felt that he loved her better and trusted her entirely; to-night, when every other light was dim, his affection was burning with a clear, unwavering flame, and though he had more problems to perplex him than any of his companions, he was certainly the least troubled of the four.

At eleven Harry had gone suddenly downstairs, and brought back with him a large hour-glass, which he placed in the centre of the chimney-piece. It had been already turned, and the sands, as they ran through in their thin and almost invisible stream, were heaping up in the lower bulb a tiny pyramid which mounted and slipped down, and mounted again, and held the eye of those who watched it with a kind of fascination. Stephen saw that so long as he was looking at the base of the mound, it appeared to grow but slowly, while the moment his glance travelled upwards to the

point of infall, the rush of atoms seemed to be immensely accelerated. He amused himself by recalling the old comparison of the days or hours of life to the running sands, and wondered idly how many before him had noted that time, like the atoms on the heap, passes quickly or slowly according to the point of view from which it is looked at.

"It is a terribly vivid image," he said at last to Aubrey.

"Yes," she replied; "but which part do you take for our life?"

"Oh," he said in surprise, "the upper half; don't we say that a man's days are numbered, or that his days are running out?"

She smiled, but kept to the low, quiet tone which was intended only for his ear.

"But we are surely gaining," she said, "not losing. Time may give; he certainly cannot take away."

"I see," he replied; "but if we are the lower half, what happens when the heap is finished and there are no more sands to come? The image does not help us there."

"Yes, it shows that when that happens Time is at an end for us; to go on with that kind of life would involve being started again as empty as we were at the beginning."

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, to me there is nothing there worth having; if you take my memory away, you take my self."

"You think that?" he exclaimed, in a low, eager voice, looking deep into her eyes.

She smiled again her faint, half-mocking smile, as if she had long known how eager he was to have that question solved, and had purposely delayed to answer it.

"I have always thought so," she replied. "But see how quickly the sand is falling; there is not much left now."

"No," said Harry, springing up; "it is almost time we went down."

They followed him from the room and down the stairs; the household was gathered in the outer hall, looking towards the door, which was unbarred but still closed. The hour was not quite up. For a moment Harry stood waiting with his hand upon the latch; then he flung the door wide open, and spoke the traditional words, "Farewell the old, and enter what God will."

There was a pause, and then a stir of almost terrified surprise; a footstep came across the dark and silent courtyard, a black shadow crossed the circle of light beyond the door, and came quickly into the porch itself. Harry stepped back; the figure passed him by and strode on into the hall.

"Edmund," said the voice of Ralph Tremur, "do what you will with me to-morrow; but I can go no further to-night."

"Hush!" said Edmund, and he drew Ralph quickly away to his own room.

Harry followed them scowling; Stephen and Aubrey wished each other a happy New Year with a long hand-grip and shining eyes.

XLVII

NEITHER Stephen nor Aubrey heard a word of Ralph's story that night, and they had great difficulty in finding an opportunity to speak with him alone next day. At last, when Harry was engaged by his father for an hour's talk on matters of business, and Edmund had left Sir Henry's bedside for a short rest in his own room, they all three slipped out of the house together and took the path up the down, which, being at the back of the house, lay out of sight of Sir Henry's window. To guard still further against being followed, they turned aside out of the Selwood track about halfway down the avenue, and made for a small hollow a furlong to the right, formed by stone-quarrying in another generation, and now thickly fringed with bushes and undergrowth. Here they could sit in some comfort, sheltered from the wind and facing the low afternoon sun, but, above all, secure from any kind of interruption.

"Now," said Stephen, when they were safely settled there, "tell us quickly, Ralph, how the situation has changed since you were last here."

Ralph laughed a short and angry laugh. "Changed,

indeed! Last time I was among friends; an enemy is master here now."

The other two had not a word to say to this; it was not true, but it was too near the truth.

"That is not what I meant," said Stephen. "I was asking you what has happened: what have you been doing, what has the Bishop done?"

"I have seen him at last," replied Ralph, with a touch of exultation in his voice. "He surpassed himself; my only fear is that his eloquence prevented him from hearing half of what I told him."

Aubrey glanced at Stephen with a swift, appreciative twinkle in her eyes.

"Did you follow all that he said?" she asked, with great simplicity.

"Not I," replied Ralph; "it was my last earthly chance of speaking to the Church face to face."

She looked at him with the fond, admiring regret of a mother for the gallant perversity of her child.

"Oh, Ralph," she said, "you will drive him to extremes."

"Look here," he replied more soberly, "the mischief is all done; it is the remedy that we must think about. It is four days since I saw him; by now his threats are threats no longer. He has cursed me with bell, book, and candle; he has proclaimed me an

outcast, a leper, one cut off from the body of Christ and given over to everlasting torments."

Aubrey gave a low exclamation of horror.

Stephen's anger flamed up into his eyes. "Who cares?" he cried fiercely; "his curses cannot make right wrong."

"No," said Ralph, "but they can make life impossible for me. He has persuaded my other Fathers in God, the Bishops of London and Wells, to excommunicate me too; I have not a friend outside their jurisdiction, nor any means of livelihood. You will see the last of me to-morrow."

"Why?" asked Stephen. "Why not stay here as you did before?"

Ralph looked at him with the gentlest and kindest look that Stephen had ever seen upon his face.

"Dear fellow," he said, "you are forgetting. My leprosy is contagious now; he that takes my hand is lost too. Harry Marland is right to-day, whatever he was yesterday."

"Oh, don't be hard, don't misjudge him," cried Aubrey. "Whatever he was yesterday, he will be right to-day; he will never give you up, he will find some way out for you."

"Ay," said Ralph, "the open door."

The words were bitter, but very gently spoken, and moved his hearers to sympathy rather than indignation.

Aubrey looked thoughtfully at Stephen, who was staring grimly at the distant line of wood behind which the sun was at this moment disappearing. He knew that Ralph made no mistake; powerless or not, Harry would not shelter him: but he was turning rapidly over in his own mind a dozen possible and impossible courses; one way or another he was determined that the Bishop should be baulked.

At last the bright gold was gone from behind the distant trees; the valley filled imperceptibly with a soft grey twilight. Stephen stood up suddenly with a quick, resolute movement, and held out a hand to each of his companions.

"Come," he said, "it is getting dark; let us go back and talk to Edmund."

They walked slowly towards the avenue. As they turned into it the sound of hoofs came rapidly across the down, and they had barely time to step back between the trees before two horsemen galloped past them, and went down over the edge towards the house. Aubrey had gone forward again into the path, and stood looking after them.

"I believe——" she began with amazement in her voice. "I thought——"

But at that moment a louder noise was heard. Stephen sprang forward and drew her back out of the track. Half a dozen riders were following the

other two; they passed at the same fierce gallop, and with a clank of steel somewhere among them; the acrid steam of their horses seemed to sicken the quiet twilight. Aubrey looked at the two men; her amazement was near terror now.

"You were right," said Ralph; "the hunt is up already." But he went on walking towards the house without any sign of fear.

XLVIII

EDMUND met them at the door. He was very grave, and spoke briefly.

"Ralph," he said, in a low voice, "the Bishop is here; you must go straight to the keeper's lodge and sup there. To-night, when you hear the curfew bell, go round to the old gate at the west side of the garden; one of us will come and tell you what has happened."

Ralph hesitated for a moment, then gave in and went without a word.

Edmund turned to Aubrey and Stephen. "We have no time to consult now," he said; "the only thing I can advise is that we should all speak straightforwardly when we have to speak, but that we know nothing until we are compelled to know it. From what we heard last night, the excommunication has probably been already pronounced, but that is nothing to us till we hear it as a fact from the Bishop himself. You understand?"

They nodded and went in with him.

Supper that night was a terrible ordeal; the Bishop alone was at his ease. His manner showed his

perception of the fact that the government of Gardenleigh had practically changed hands, and that the new lord was likely to be easier to deal with than the old one. Harry more than half-resented this attitude, for although he had no intention of defending Ralph, he was by nature quite as jealous as his father of all ecclesiastical pretensions. Aubrey and Stephen were embarrassed by marks of confidence which they did not deserve, and yet could not reject. Edmund, as ever, bore on his own shoulders the anxieties of all the rest, and he had, in addition, to devise the means of clearing up the position in time to warn Ralph that night, for it seemed only too probable that Gardenleigh would be no place for him next day.

When they found themselves once more gathered round the fire after supper, there was little time to be lost. Edmund threw all his strategy aside, and came straight to the point.

"My lord," he said, "can you give us any news of Ralph Tremur?"

"I am glad that you have asked me that," replied the Bishop, "because I should otherwise have had some reluctance to pain you, Edmund, by opening the subject myself. I grieve to tell you that he has finally proved himself unworthy of your friendship."

Edmund would have ventured another question, but Harry interrupted him.

"My dear Edmund," he said, "you really must not argue any more; you have done all that any one could expect of you. Ralph has pleaded his own cause, and been condemned. My lord has found it necessary to excommunicate him, and there is an end of the matter. We can give him no further countenance."

Edmund did not reply. His last appeal must be to the Bishop, not to his brother.

"My lord," he said, standing humbly before the splendid figure enthroned in the great chair of red-and-white velvet, "this man has been very near our hearts; is nothing more permitted to us?"

"Nothing," answered the Bishop, sternly. "Henceforth he is dead and damned, outcast alike from the Church on earth and the mercy of God."

"By whom?" cried Stephen, leaping to his feet. "By man, his fellow-man, and by an ignorant and unjust sentence."

"You forget, sir," said the Bishop, with great dignity, turning towards Harry.

"Stephen, you are mad," said Harry.

"I am not mad, and I forget nothing," cried Stephen, hotly; "but where one persecutes, another may defend, or you make the world a torture-house and a place of slaves. Curse me too, if you will, with all your bells and candles. I am for Ralph and the outer darkness."

An eternal silence seemed to fall upon the room. He dared not look at Aubrey; the faces of the rest had in one instant grown as unreal to him as the stone effigies of a long dead past. Before any one had moved or spoken, he had closed the door behind him. A moment later he had taken all his money from his room, and was hurrying to the garden across the starlit valley. He had lost Aubrey, but he knew that to turn back would have been to lose her no less certainly

XLIX

INSIDE the garden gate Ralph was waiting. Stephen found him pacing quietly up and down at the western end of the avenue, his broad face expanded into a smile of pleasurable anticipation. The furious spirit which had so often torn him at the mere thought of authority, seemed to have departed now that the tyranny had actually come upon him; he had raved against a general system of coercion, but when it was practically applied in his own case, he seemed rather to enjoy the struggle.

"Well," he asked cheerfully, as Stephen came within hail, "have the hounds winded me yet?"

"I do not think the Bishop knows that you are here," replied Stephen, "but he soon will. He has excommunicated you, and Harry has accepted his decision."

"Then I must go," said Ralph.

"So must I," said Stephen; "come, we have nothing to stay for."

"Where are you going?"

"I hardly know. I have some land in Warwickshire."

"Safe enough for you," replied Ralph, "but not for me. I tell you they are hunting me; you have not heard all. When I was preaching down there in Cornwall I took the pyx out of a church, and burnt the Host before a houseful of people. I broke into the church, you understand, and those fellows with the Bishop have the sheriff's writ against me."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you? but the Bishop does. The civil law kills quicker than his curses; give a man without money or friends one winter in gaol, and he will never live to stand his trial. No! I'll not be caught. I shall make straight for Weymouth without touching a high-road, and if I can earn or beg a passage to France——"

"Ah!" cried Stephen, joyfully, "I had forgotten." He took out the money and put it into Ralph's hand.

The weight told its own tale. Small though the packet was, it held not merely a safe passage to France, but food and shelter for a year at least. Ralph, in his triumphant joy over the gift, quite forgot to thank the giver. This to him was something more than a personal escape, a personal success. He turned towards the house across the valley, the house which held his enemy, and raised both his clenched hands above his head in a kind of ecstacy.

"O John, John, John of Exeter!" he cried, "I

shall outlive you yet. England is yours to-day, but I shall come back. I shall come back when you are dust."

Then he remembered, and turned to grasp Stephen by both hands.

"I am not quite an outcast," he said, "while I have a patron saint. I shall keep St. Stephen's Day when I have forgotten all the rest. Now I must be gone; but there is one thing more. It will be safest not to speak of me, but if ever you meet John Wyclif, at Oxford or elsewhere, take him aside and tell him all he cares to hear."

Stephen could not speak; he felt that he could not utter lifeless commonplaces in presence of this buoyant and sanguine vitality, and his real thoughts were too confused and tumultuous to find expression. He pressed Ralph's hand in silence, and stood watching in a maze of memories and conjectures so long as he continued in sight. He saw him cross the park where it lay open to the stars, and followed the swing of his step as he marched noiselessly along the edge of the high wood: now he was hardly more than a shadow; now the imagination saw him rather than the eye; and now even the darkness kept no trace of him. Stephen turned away with leaden feet; the longing of farewell drew him irresistibly. He passed along the bare, ruined arcade of leafless trees slowly and

with no conscious will, but when he found himself by Aubrey's seat he knew why he had come. There was the lake by which he had walked so pleasantly with those he loved, and fought so fiercely against that which he hated. There was the church on its island, the church which seemed to stand so wholly apart from life, yet to which all the lives around it were continually and inevitably returning. There was the house by whose fireside he had sat in peace, and heard the echoes of a great nation's voice, loud with the triumph of war, and deep with the murmur of just rebellion. There, too, he had followed Love; lost, found, conquered, and resigned. How could he turn his back on this place and live?

He leaned upon the low wall where he sat, with a hand as cold as the stone itself. The night was so silent and the shadows so motionless that it seemed as if all life had ceased, and the earth had passed out of the region of change. Thought, regret, and the sense of time died in him; he saw all that he had ever done as a bright and curious picture, the events of which were strangely vivid, but drawn so small and so remote that they could no longer touch the springs of human feeling.

L

When he found himself once more in the world of thought and action, the stars were pale and the shadows had faded from the grass; a faint breeze touched him with a mysterious warning of change, and passed on as if to deliver the same message to others of its secret fellowship. He rose reluctantly in obedience to the summons, and turned to look around. Above him, to the right, loomed the entrance to the western avenue, the shadowy corner where he had once sat with Aubrey to hear the story of Ogier the Dane; and as he looked, a cloaked and hooded figure flitted from beneath the great elm, and came towards him with a light, familiar step. By the form, by the grace, by the quickening of some subtle sense within him, he knew who it was that came, though her face was hidden, and he could not guess the purpose of her coming. She moved towards him swiftly, and as he went to meet her he saw in a flash, as one sees an arrow's direction in the last moment before it strikes, that she was coming not with uncertainty, but with resolve. An instant after she had thrown back the hood from her face, and her arms were clasped about his neck. He kissed her

in a dream, with utter and unquestioning content; then as he drew back and looked into her eyes, his heart leaped like a bird in the net: this was no longer the lady of his desire and his despair, but one whom until this moment he had never seen or met with or imagined—a stranger, the strangest among women, for she was his own. Yet he bent over her once more, and as their lips touched, he knew that always and in all existences her life and his had been and were to be inseparably bound together.

"Why are you here?" she asked at length.

"I was saying good-bye; I thought that I must go."

"Go where you will," she said, "and I go with you."

"You cannot," he said; "you have not thought."

Her lips trembled, but her eyes laughed at him. "It was always I who thought; you were only feeling."

"Yes, I have broken all my rules."

"But you have kept all mine." She laughed happily, and ended with a little sigh of satisfaction.

"Tell me your thoughts," he said; "I have been in the dark so long."

She looked up at him gravely for a moment, as if hesitating; then, while he wondered, the old bright malice flashed out irresistibly.

"I was thinking how different things would have been if you had not broken all your rules."

"Different for you?"

"Oh! you cannot think what it would have been to leave this place."

"How can you bear to leave it now?"

She laughed again. "You are changed, indeed."

"No," he said, "but I have learned so much."

Again she sighed out her happiness. "Ah! if you had not learned!",

"But even now, how can you leave it?"

"To go with you," she answered gravely, "is not to leave it."

He looked fondly at her, but the doubt in his eyes was still unanswered.

"No," she repeated, "not now; my home goes with you. Do you think that so slight a change?"

"How could I know?" he pleaded. "I had heard that lovers live in one another."

Gentle scorn played about her lips. "O man!" she said, "what woman could ever live in a palace of to-morrows?"

Her voice had all the tones that had so long delighted him, but through and below them all there was now another that he had not known; a soft, deep note of certainty, of rest, of possession, that woke an answering vibration within him, unlike any feeling he had ever known.

Long after she ceased speaking he was silent,

listening to this new music, until at last he was recalled by the pressure of her hand in his.

"Where shall we go?" he asked, rising to his feet.

"To the garden first," she said, "for roses."

"Roses?" he asked. "I thought it had been winter this long while."

"Have I been so cold?" she cried, leading him towards the rose-alley under the old red wall of the garden.

He followed unresisting, in dreamy contentment. To-night the wilderness had blossomed for him, to-day a new dawn was breaking upon a new world; why should there not be roses in midwinter?

She plucked a handful and gave them to him. They were red and sweet; the green thorns pricked him as he grasped them, the dew splashed coldly upon his hand and wrist; all down the alley the dusk was fresh with the same cool fragrance, and overhead between the heavy poles a tangle of leaves and rambling clusters darkened the gray spaces of the sky.

At the end they turned and came slowly back; the east was lightening before them, and Stephen saw, when they crossed the avenue again, that the great aisle was massy now and star-proof with sombre green. By Aubrey's seat the terrace lay once more as he remembered it: below, the long slope of the park was a deep sea of summer grass, with trees in full foliage

becalmed upon it; above, the house stared down with gray face and sightless windows, as cold and still as when he saw it last under the setting moon. A second time the light breeze whispered a mysterious message and was gone again; a faint flush rose behind the distant hills and mounted till half the sky was glowing softly with ethereal blue and crimson.

"There comes the sun," said Aubrey; "let us see what time it is."

They leaned upon the sun-dial together, watching intently for the first pale shadow, as if great things depended on the due performance of the rite. When the moment came at last, and the golden light fell across the dial, they looked up at one another and smiled.

"Our first day has begun," she said.

He pressed her hand silently, and they looked down again at the shadow, watching it dreamily as it moved from one figure to another on the green, mould-spotted circle of bronze.

"How fast it steals along!" he said, musing; "it counts our moments as hours."

"That is nothing to us," she murmured, still more softly. "We know that it is only a shadow."

THE END

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